

The types and motivation of social network users:

A qualitative study of young adults.

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to understand the motivation of social network users aged 18-24. Based on qualitative research and content analysis, this study proposes to understand their behavior and what motivates them to use social networks. Our main finding in this research is a motivation-based typology of social networks users and their psychological profile.

Keywords: Users networks typologies, consumer behavior, qualitative research

Introduction

Social networks have grown significantly as users interact more and more. Social networks are considered an extremely powerful tool for communicating and managing customer relationships. The number of users and amount of content generated through interacting, sharing and publishing on social networks have grown considerably in the last few years (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Worldwide, there are over 2.16 billion monthly active Facebook users for Q4 2017 which is a 14 percent increase year over year. (Statista, 2018). Every 60 seconds on Facebook: 510,000 comments are posted, 293,000 statuses are updated, and 136,000 photos are uploaded. (The Social Skinny, 2017). Twitter has recorded more than 330 million users since its inception in 2006 and has more than 1.6 billion searches per day (Statista, 2018).

For businesses, this offers a huge opportunity to develop customer relationships through marketing and communication strategy involving social networks. In marketing, multiple research papers have highlighted the role of social networks in developing companies' business and better understanding their environment (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011; Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2013; Ghazali and Cai, 2014). In brand management, some research has tried to understand the role and the impact of social networks on brand perception and how consumers develop their opinion about the brand (Reyneke, Pitt and Berthon, 2010, Both and Ann Matic, 2011, Lipsman, Mudd, Rich and Bruich 2012, Botha, Farshid, and Pitt, 2011). Other studies have tried to understand the role of social networks as a source of innovation and creativity in terms of product development and service quality improvement (Ernst Brem, and Voigt, 2013). In the field of consumer behavior, research has focused on users' motivation to use social networks (Kim, Shim and Mo Ahn, 2011). These studies have focused on one social network (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) at a time while overlooking users' motivation with a global vision independently of the type of social network.

Our research will focus on social networks users' motivation. Two main points differentiate this research. On the one hand, our research will be conducted among young people between 18 and

24 years of age. We choose this age group because it is the biggest group of social network users and, at the same time, it is the group with highest time spent on social networks with an average of 5 to 6 hours per day (Statista, 2018). On the other hand, our research will not be limited to one specific social network but all of them.

Literature Review

For many researchers, motivation is an important factor to understand and to explain consumer behavior (Deci and Ryan, 1987). Defined as the direction and intensity of the effort to earn a recompense (Weinberg and Gould, 1997), motivation is a driving force for an individual to perform an action. Two types of motivation can be identified in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable and for the pleasure that can be derived from it (Lee, Cheung and Chen, 2005). The second type is extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome such as obtaining a reward, improving one's performance at work or having economic promotions (Davis et al., 1992; Lee, Cheung and Chen, 2005). Most research on motivation has shown that the performance obtained and the quality of involvement can be very different when we adopt intrinsic or extrinsic motivations. When we are intrinsically motivated we are moved to act for the fun or challenge involved rather than because of external prods, pressures, or rewards. In theory, we identify intrinsic motivation between individuals, but in another sense, an intrinsic motivation exists between individuals and activities. In fact, people are not motivated to do the same activity or to be interested to perform the same tasks. On the other hand, when we are extrinsically motivated we seek separable rewards after an activity.

To conclude, there are two types of motivation that impact individuals' behavior. Intrinsic motivation related to an emotional value to do an activity and extrinsic motivation which is related to an instrumental value. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be applied to the utilitarian-hedonic model in consumer behavior theory. The model suggests that hedonic behavior is a consequence of intrinsic motivation; however, utilitarian behavior is a consequence of extrinsic motivation (Heijden, 2004). The utilitarian-hedonic model suggests that the consumer may adopt utilitarian motivation or hedonic motivation based on the nature of the product (Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994, Guitinan and Monore 1980). Consumers with utilitarian motivation follow a rational behavior. From the beginning, they have a specific goal and will try to achieve it conscientiously. For example, when consumers search for information in the decision making process, they adopt utilitarian motivation because the objective is to maximize the usefulness of their decision and therefore reduce the associated risk (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989). Thus, a utilitarian system involves goal-oriented behavior characterized by a focus on a specific objective defined in advance by the consumer. On the other hand, hedonic motivation aims at seeking stimulation, excitement, gratification, pleasure and discovering new feelings (Babin, Darden and Griffin, 1994). The hedonic system is characterized by experiential, personal, and subjective behavior (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982).

Social networks and motivation

Despite the fact that the number of social media users continues to grow to over 1.5 billion worldwide, research to understand users' motivation for using social media is still limited. Indeed, the little research carried out to date has mainly focused on specific issues. Hsieh, Yang and Fu (2012) studied the role of motivation as a variable impacting the switching behavior within different social networks. The aim for the authors was to explain the intention to change from one network to another, taking into account the cost generated as a moderating variable between the antecedent variables that are the relative utility, the effectiveness of the expression and playfulness. In information system theory, some research has shown that social networks users with intrinsic motivation expect more emotional rewards compared to users with extrinsic motivation (Kim, Shim and Mo Ahn, 2011). Regarding the youth population, some research has shown that the motivation of high school students to use social networks was mainly to communicate and exchange with colleges, friends and family (Lenhart and Madden 2007). This type of motivation is supported by the ease of use of social networks (Kim, Shim, & Ahn, 2011). For the authors, using social networks is a new manner for people to manage their relationships.

On the other hand, another motivation of young people is their need to develop their career after their studies. In fact, social networks for them are a very simple tool to develop their network, to search for a job opportunity and to be continuously informed about the job market (Schaefer, 2008). Social networks, by their simplicity and their high level of interactivity and socialization, has changed the way in which people communicate, exchange, participate and discuss with others on a specific forum (Kim, Shim, & Ahn, 2011). For users, social networks are an opportunity to express themselves through the creation of their own pages, personalized website, or to create their own video channel on social media (Pelling & White, 2009). This activity will bring them recognition (Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2009), allow them to create and to be a part of a community. At the same time, social networks provide an opportunity to "escape" reality, boredom and relieve stress by sharing emotions (Kim, Shim, & Ahn, 2011). It is relevant to note that motivations are different among women and men. As an example, man looking to meet friends, appreciate the interactivity of social networks, while easily identifying with a group. A woman will appreciate the relational side of social networks, which will allow her to keep in contact with her close friends and family (Barker, 2009)

Research question

This research has two main objectives. The first objective is to identify the motivations of young people aged 18-24 related to their use of social networks. The second objective is to develop a typology of social network user according to their motivations. Therefore, a psychological profile of each group will be defined. Thus, we will try to answer the following questions: What are the motivations of 18-24 year olds when it comes to using social networks? Are there different types of users? In this research, we chose to study 18-24 year olds for many reasons. On the one hand, this population is considered the largest users of social networks which represent around 30% of total users. Furthermore, they have to spend an average of 4 to 6 hours per day on social networks. On the other hand, this age group is part of the Y generation, which represents more than 50% of the world's population and therefore forms a future market for companies. For all these reasons, it is urgent to study it and understand its behavior.

Methodology

As our aim is to explore the motivations of social network users aged between 18 and 24. This research will be based on a qualitative approach by conducting face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research is a relevant approach as it puts emphasis on the depth of the analyses which will lead to rich descriptions of participants' meanings based on in-depth interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Sampling

In our recruiting process, we chose participants that they are in the 18-24 age group. This type of profile is described as the most active social network user, and also has a high motivation to explain and share their social network experience (Hargittai and Hsieh, 2010). Our recruitment process was done using social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Using our own accounts on those two social networks, an announcement was posted asking people having our target profile with a high interest to participate to our research. Through our network we received 27 positive answers to participate. By the end, 24 face-to-face interviews were conducted include 12 men and 12 women with an average age of 22 years. After 20 interviews, answers collected became redundant and some repetitions were identified. We added four other interviews in order to confirm data saturation in line with the standards of qualitative research (McCracken, 1993).

Data collection

All interviews were done face-to-face. With each participant an appointment was fixed. A meeting room was booked for all interviews. The researcher paid the transportation for all participants and a symbolic gift was given. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes on average and were recorded with the consent of the participants. An interview guide was developed to conduct the discussion with open-ended questions. The interview guide was structured by theme based on our research objectives. The interview guide was structured by topic of discussion. The motivation for the use of social networks was the main theme addressed during the interview. Added to this are other themes such as:

- Usage behavior of social networks (frequency of use, number of hours of use on average, main activities, etc.) The objective here is to define different user profiles according to their degree of use.
- Self-image: Each participant in our research has to describe his self-image. i.e. what he or she thinks of him/herself. The objective is to analyze if there is a relationship between self-image and the motivation. The objective is to identify if the self-image or self-esteem have an impact on the behavior of social network users and on their motivation (Barker, 2009) and the role of the self-image to facilitate interactions and communication between users (Ferguson, 2017). The results will allow us to develop the psychological profile of each group based on their main motivation, behavior and self-image.
- The socio-demographic profile: since the entire sample has almost of the same age, the main objective here was to check whether there is a difference in the motivations and the behavior of use of the social networks mainly between women and men. A confidentiality letter was signed by

the researcher and a copy was given to the participants in order to guarantee the anonymity of all data collected.

Data analysis

The data analysis method was carried out through traditional interactive and systematic content analysis (Churchill and Wertz, 1985; Clairbrone and Ozanne, 1990). Specifically, data analysis consisted in the following stages: We started by scanning interview transcripts. The objective was to develop an initial understanding for the formulation of our research hypothesis through a process of induction (Bardin, 1977). A traditional structural analysis of the content was then conducted on the basis of all data collected. This analysis give us an initial understanding of the motivations of social network users and consequently identify the main dissimilarities. Based on different motivations and reasons given by participants we developed a motivation-based typology. Following this analysis, the core categories extracted from the literature review such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation or hedonic or utilitarian motivation were compared to the data obtained in order to identify if there is a gap between the theory and our analysis. The second phase of data analysis was focused to identify a motivation-based typology of social networks users. The third step of our data analysis was focused on developing a psychological profile of each type of social network user identified before. This profile included mainly three points: Main motivation, the specific behavior and the self-image. In order to facilitate the explanation of results, we proceeded in the tradition of qualitative research by using verbatim statements to illustrate each part of our findings (Wolcott, 1990)

Findings

Our analysis confirmed, as developed in our literature review, that there were two main motivations that push young people to use social networks. The first one is intrinsic motivation where people seeking pleasure, discovery and enjoyment when they use social networks. For this type of motivation, we can identify one group that they are more interested by creating relationships. For them, social networks are a new way to socialize and to exchange with people in a virtual manner. Another group of our participants perceive social network as a tool to flee the real world. For them, social networks are a manner to discover and to have a good time. The second is extrinsic motivation where people look to gain from their activities on social networks such as developing their network, find a job, be informed about something, etc.

Thus, three types of social network users are identified. The first group identified as "social" is motivated by developing, maintaining and manage their relationships with friends, family and other contacts. They always look to have news from their contacts, exchange with them about different subjects such as family, culture, sports, etc. They are very interested in sharing information about their situations or the activities they have done or plan to do in the future. For them, social networks can be viewed as an important tool for building relationships with new friends. One participant confirmed that "Social networks are really an extraordinary invention, it allows me to be in touch with my friends and family all the time. It's easy and it allows me to hear continuously about what they are doing. Whenever a member goes on vacation, he shares those photos, videos and information with us". For this group, social networks are also a tool to socialize in the same way as the off line environment. Another participant confirmed that "I have some family members who work in different countries, and despite the distance that separates us, we are

always in contact and we exchange news, everyone knows what the other is doing...as if we were together, I would even say that if we were together we will not be close in this way, it's the magic of Facebook I think." For this group, social relationships are extremely important and they are always looking to maintain their contact as in the real world. Another participant confirmed that "Social networks allow me to share news with my family and friends in a different format, such as, image, text and video. Personally, I am very close to my sister working in the United States, before we had a lot of contact by phone, but since we have Facebook we share everything on the network, in fact it is more convenient, it allows me to see what that she is up to, what she does through images and videos, it's really cool, exactly the same as we're together. "

Table 1: Psychological profile of the segment « social »

<i>Main Motivation</i>	Manage, interact and exchange with their private relationships
<i>Behavior</i>	Exchange private information and share content such as pictures, video, music, etc. Organize events with friends through social network They spend between 3 and 4 hours connected and interact with their friends on social networks.
<i>Self-image</i>	They describe themselves as social people, open-minded, optimistic and very sensitive
<i>Social Networks</i>	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.

The second group identified as "Functionalists". Their main motivation is to develop and manage professional contacts and career networking. Thus, their objectives are, on the one hand, to improve a professional network and to develop their contacts. On the other hand, it is about being always active on their own career development by looking for new opportunities through the contacts they have developed on the networks. One participant confirm that "I have a friend who managed to get a job through a social network, at first I did not believe much in this solution, but since then I'm really starting to get interested. I think social networks offer a new job search opportunity in a more interactive way and with new methods such as posting a CV in video form, I find it very original. «Another one add that «For me social networks and mainly the professional ones are an excellent opportunity to develop my career ambitions. I connect every day on LinkedIn, I do not spend a lot of time, but I try to find out about new job offers and manage my network that I think one day will be useful in my development careers. We never know how the opportunity can arise, that's why I heal every word I put on my profile". Functionalists take care about their image and try to be perceived as professional and efficient. Their interaction on social networks are more focus on professional exchange, participate in some discussion and give their opinion about some topics such as technology, economy and politics, etc.

Table 2: Psychological profile of the segment « functionalists »

<i>Main Motivation</i>	Develop a professional network
<i>Behavior</i>	No communication and no exchange about private life. Social networks is considered a tool to promote their career and their professional image They try to be continuously informed about the changes in the job market and the career evolution of their network They take more time to do any comments or to post any information because they are aware that this will reflect their own image Average time of connection per day: between 1 and 2 hours
<i>Self-image</i>	Describe themselves as hardworking people, ambitious with a lot of willpower.
<i>Social network</i>	LinkedIn, Viadeo, facebook

The third group is "hedonists". The main motivation of this group is seeking entertainment, fun and pleasure. For them, social networks are a way to entertain themselves by sharing information in different formats such as images, videos and texts that generally include funny content. It is a very active group on social networks as they seek to be the first to share or comment on entertaining and fun content. Using social networks and spending time for it is a manner to reduce stress, to discover, to have emotional experience, etc. One participant confirmed that "I am continuously connected. For me it is very important to be in touch with my friends all the time. Nowadays it is very difficult to find time to see my friends and to share some fun moments. Social networks reduce a lot my frustration, because it is another manner for me to interact with my friends and my family. It is very easy to share information and to have a nice moment, even it is virtual, but it is better than nothing. It doesn't replace the real world but it is for me a good way to be continuously in touch." Another participant confirmed: "It is really a good way to reduce the stress after a workday. For me it is like another world in parallel, when I connect I am always excited to find a funny publication and humoristic video or image, etc." For this segment, social networks are also a new manner to help them to make a decision before buying something. Their interactions with their friends and share opinion about their own experience help them to make the good decision.

Table 3: Psychological profile of the segment « hedonists»

<i>Main Motivation</i>	Seeking entertainment, fun, discovering and pleasure
<i>Behavior</i>	They exchange and communicate on entertaining and fun multimedia content. They are very active users and try to be the first to comment on others' publications and share them. Connecting to social networks for them is a way to reduce stress, to discover and create emotional experience with others The average connection time for this group is 3 to 4 hours per day.
<i>Self-Image</i>	They perceive themselves as a sociable people, dynamic and very important in their social networks.
<i>Social Networks</i>	Facebook, Twitter, digg

This research gives us an in-depth understanding regarding the motivations of the 18-24 year old segment and their behavior on social networks. Our analysis identifies three groups of users with the same demographic profile but with different behaviors in terms of social networks use. The first one is the social cluster, they are motivated by staying in contact and maintaining their relationships with their friends and family. The second one is the hedonists' cluster who are mainly motivated by entertainment and delight. These two groups have an intrinsic motivation with an experiential behavior. Both clusters are seeking emotional sensations and discovery. Through their interaction they try to explore new experiences and adventures. They are in search of entertainment, fantasy, arousal, sensory stimulation, and enjoyment, fun and pleasure through social networks. On the other hand, the functionalists are mainly motivated by professional objectives such as the development of their careers and their networks. This cluster has an extrinsic motivation which supposes that they have a utilitarian behavior when they use social networks. They are seeking to develop their networks and their professional contacts. Users are concerned with their career development and their professional image in an efficient and timely manner to achieve their goals with a minimum of irritation. The results obtained in our research are perfectly in line with many other researchers (Hoffman and Novak's; 1996; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Sherry, McGrath and Levy, 1993). Indeed, the authors evoke an experiential behavior and a behavior directed towards a goal. The first is driven by a hedonic and exploratory motivation, while the second is driven by a utilitarian motivation.

Conclusions, limitations and further research

Social networks provide young people with the opportunity to identify within group members who look and act similarly to each other. In our research, three main groups of social networks users based on their motivation are identified, social, functionalist and hedonic groups. This typology gives us a better understanding of their motivation and their behaviors with regard to social network use. The majority of the participants in our research show a real attachment to social networks with a high level and frequency of use, which can be considered a business opportunity for many companies. Indeed, this population is a strategic target for marketing actions and therefore building strong relationships and developing positive attitudes toward the brand is important. Identifying how this market segment interacts with the social networks and how they describe themselves it can be a good opportunity for many companies to develop a very efficient customer acquisition strategy and to better manager customer relationships.

The focus of this research is to understand young people's motivation and their post-adoption behavior with regard to social network use. Many limits can be identified in our research. Firstly, our concept of psychological profile is limited with three main variables such as motivation, behavior and self-image. This profile do not take in consideration other psychological variables such as perception, involvement or attitude. As an example, the role of perceived risk as a source of resistance to innovation or new product adoption and the risk related to the use of social networks such as personal image and reputation were not studied in this research. On the other hand, this research did not take into account the impact of the atmosphere variables such as the ease of use, the ergonomic, the design and the structure of the social network website on the users' behavior (Donthu, 2001; Tam Tsui Wa, 2001; Koufaris, 2002; Roy, Montoya-Weiss, Voss and Grewal 2003). As defined in our methodology this research focused on the young adults from 18 to 24 years old. Our sample is from the same geographical region (Switzerland and France) and the results obtained cannot be generalized for the whole population of 18-24 years old and our

results implications were limited. This is can be explained with the difference in the culture and social environment between many regions in the world and consequently between this segment of the population.

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