The Influence of Computer-Mediated Communication Apprehension on Motives for Facebook Use

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The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of computer-mediated communication apprehension on motives for using the interactive features on Facebook. An online survey was completed by 417 undergraduate students. Guided by uses and gratifications theory, communication apprehension in a computer-mediated context was found to be inversely related to interpersonal, self-expression, entertainment, and passing time motives for using Facebook. This study also investigated how Facebook motives predict the use of its interactive features. Interpersonal communication, self-expression, and entertainment motives all significantly predicted use of interactive features on Facebook.

Social networking sites (SNSs) attract approximately three-fourths of online American teenagers and young adults, primarily for purposes of socialization and identity construction (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Urresta, Dong, & Day, 2009). SNSs help individuals keep in touch with pre-existing offline contacts for relationship maintenance, as well as make new contacts based on common likes and interests (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Owing to their growing popularity, SNSs now account for nearly a quarter of the time spent by users online (Nielsen, 2011). The most popular SNS today—Facebook—was originally designed as a networking site for
college students. Facebook’s rapid growth and immense popularity has intrigued communication scholars with an interest in this new form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). Facebook embraces the interactivity of the Internet by allowing users to utilize various features designed for interpersonal communication. Facebook users spend their time browsing through other users’ posts and profiles, liking or commenting on posts, or simply updating their own profiles. Since these are essentially expressive acts, the key to better understanding CMC is through a comprehensive examination of the communication apprehension trait. Communication apprehension (CA) refers to a state and trait-like anxiety about communicating, with trait-like CA being a relatively stable personality characteristic (McCroskey, Richmond, & Davis, 1986). CA represents one of the most frequently studied variables in human communication, having been examined in various contexts across several decades (Levine & McCroskey, 1990; McCroskey, 2009).

Despite the fact that SNSs are now mainstream—having doubled their reach to encompass half of the U.S. adult population since 2008—our understanding of user motivations remains incomplete (Lin & Atkin, in press; Pew, 2010). In light of this rapidly changing media environment, scholars suggest that further research needs to account for the impact of third variables on communication dynamics involving new media (e.g., Bucy & Tao, 2007). The current research examines the impact of computer-mediated communication apprehension (CMCA) on use of interactive features available on Facebook, and in particular, the mediating effect of audience motives on the relationship between CMCA and use of interactive features.

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites have been defined as “Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections” (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) identified several SNS orientations such as maintaining relationships, connecting with people with shared interests, and initiating romantic relationships. According to Facebook.com, Facebook’s mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Facebook, 2012). The popularity of Facebook stems from the fact that it is a relatively open and transparent platform, one capable of being used to gather personal information about other users (Urista et al., 2009).

The SNS literature has been growing in recent years and studies have examined multiple dimensions of Facebook use, including the benefits of social capital (Ellison et al., 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2009), differences between users and non-users (Hargittai, 2008), privacy concerns (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008), impression management (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008), and motives (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Sheldon, 2008a;
Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011). The uses and gratifications research that examines motives for SNS use is particularly relevant to the current study.

**Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and gratifications theory explains the motives, needs, and gratifications associated with media use (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). This theory represents a paradigm shift in media-audience research, having moved the focus from media’s effect on people to people’s use of various media (Blumler, 1979; Rubin, 2002). Katz et al. (1974) explained that research addressing the uses and gratifications of media is concerned with “(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones” (p. 20).

The uses and gratifications theory is well suited for studying new media and particularly the Internet (Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Morris & Ogan, 1996; Ruggiero, 2000). Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) identified five motives for Internet use: interpersonal utility, passing time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. Similar motives have been identified in other studies examining new media. Sheldon (2008a) found that individuals use Facebook to primarily fulfill interpersonal communication needs (i.e., relationship maintenance). Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) combined uses and gratifications theory with a social networks approach to examine how motives influenced the generation of social capital though Facebook. Several motives were identified by the authors: expressive information sharing, habitual passing of time, entertainment, companionship, professional advancement, social interaction, and forming new friendships.

The theoretical strength of uses and gratifications can be enhanced by the exploration of similar typologies of motives across media types (Ruggiero, 2000). Several of the motives explicaded for Internet use can be replicated for SNS use. Four of the motives identified by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) will be examined in the current exploration of interactive feature uses on SNSs. The motives of entertainment and passing time have typically been identified in the communication literature as motivations for television, news, Internet and SNS use (Sheldon, 2008b; Tewksbury & Althaus, 2000). Self-expression was added as an additional motive because of research suggesting that SNS users express themselves through their online personalities (boyd, 2007; Livingstone, 2010; Zywica & Danowski, 2008). Self-expression can be seen as the act of presenting one’s point of view or creative work (Van House & Davis, 2005).

The Internet provides users an opportunity to express aspects of their identity that may be difficult to express face-to-face (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002). The interpersonal communication utility used by Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) is similar to the relationship maintenance motive (Sheldon, 2008b) and the companionship/
social interaction motives (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). Interpersonal utility accounts for affection, companionship, and control motives (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Information seeking will also be considered as a motive in the current research, but with the items reflecting information seeking on Facebook. These SNS motives may be a function of communication apprehension, the literature for which we address in the following section.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension was first developed as a tool to measure public speaking anxiety but in the past 50 years has become one of the most researched constructs in the field of communication (McCroskey, 2009). Research in this area has divided communication apprehension into trait and state apprehension. In the current study, communication apprehension is being measured within the context of CMC. The context-based dimension of communication apprehension is seen as an enduring personality type with regard to communication in variegated particular contexts (McCroskey et al., 1986). In the context-based view, communication apprehension is similar to the trait-like dimension but only within the context under study.¹

As the literature on CMC continues to grow, researchers have turned their attention to computer-mediated communication apprehension. Research by Scott and Rockwell (1997) examined the role of CMCA on using new media technology but used traditional approaches to measuring communication apprehension. Flaherty, Pearce, and Rubin (1998) suggested that elements of communication apprehension could be common across face-to-face and online channels. In Patterson and Gojdycz’s (2000) investigation on the impact of communication apprehension on e-mailing, Web browsing, and chatting, the authors found that communication anxiety did not impact CMC use. Watson (2007) tested several different measures of apprehension (oral, written, CMC) and found that only CMCA had a negative impact on SNS use.

Scott and Timmerman (2005) created a measure of CMCA by modifying a pre-existing scale of communication apprehension for communicating within the online environment. They found that CMCA negatively predicted use of technology. Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2007) created a model to examine CMCA, noting that online apprehension operates differently from traditional verbal notions of communication apprehension. Although studies have examined the role of communication apprehension in CMC (Flaherty et al., 1998; Patterson & Gojdycz, 2000; Scott & Rockwell, 1997; Scott & Timmerman, 2005; Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2007), the relationship between CMCA and the use of interactive features of SNS has not been widely investigated in the communication literature. One study examined the role of CMCA on use of SNSs but operationalized “use” by how often participants visited SNSs and updated their profile (Watson, 2007). Preliminary work on CMC adoption suggests that people with communication apprehension also suffer from CMCA.
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(Patterson & Gojdycz, 2000; Scott & Timmerman, 2005). However, this “poor get poorer” perspective on communication apprehension overlooks the fact that SNSs could facilitate positive social interactions enabling the “poor to get richer.”

There are several antecedents that influence individual motives for communication. One of the major assumptions of uses and gratifications theory is that people are guided by psychological and social factors when making media choices (Flaherty et al., 1998; Rubin, 2002). Communication apprehension has been demonstrated to be an important antecedent of communication motives (Flaherty et al., 1998). As SNS use is increasing, the communication literature needs further explication on how CMCA negatively influences motives to use interactive features. The degree of choice offered by SNSs and other new media technologies suggests that the role of motives may be equally as important in this context as it has been in traditional media (Ruggiero, 2000). For instance, Finn (1997) demonstrated the importance of looking at uses and gratifications in relation to traits as a means of understanding the role of motives in forming social identities. Based on the above literature on CMCA and motives for media use, the following hypotheses are presented:

H1: Computer-mediated communication apprehension is positively related to information seeking on Facebook.

H2: Computer-mediated communication apprehension is inversely related to using Facebook for interpersonal communication.

H3: Computer-mediated communication apprehension is inversely related to self-expression on Facebook.

H4: Computer-mediated communication apprehension is inversely related to using Facebook for entertainment.

H5: Computer-mediated communication apprehension is inversely related to using Facebook to pass time.

Interactive Features

Our understanding of new media uses can be further informed by a wider consideration of the concept of interactivity (Morris & Ogan, 1996; Mundorf & Laird, 2002). Interactive communication involves the interchangeable role from sender to receiver and can be synchronous or asynchronous (Mundorf & Laird, 2002). Online interactivity blurs the distinction between mass and interpersonal communication (Morris & Ogan, 1996). Smock et al. (2011) re-conceptualized the term SNS as a collection of features. Employing the uses and gratifications perspective, the authors found that different motives drive the use of different features than motives for general use of the site. Their findings indicate that conceptualizing SNS use with regard to the different features used provides greater insight into user motivations. In the current research, we took a different approach and created a combined scale of interactive feature use that could also be parcelled out into the different types of activity.
For instance, Chung and Yoo (2008) emphasized the importance of differentiating among medium, human/medium, and human interactivity. In their research, they explained the differences among the three types of interactivity. *Medium* interactivity involves a user interacting with the medium itself and controlling the communication process though technology. *Human/medium* interactivity involves partial human communication but incorporates many of the characteristics of medium interactivity. *Human* interactivity involves more than one person communicating through a channel (synchronously). Many of the interactive features on Facebook could be categorized under what the authors refer to as human/medium interactive features. These features take advantage of the interpersonal communication features available on Facebook, and other SNSs, allowing users to interact with one another asynchronously. Owing to the dearth of literature on interactive feature use, we posit the following research question:

**RQ1:** Which motives for using Facebook predict the use of its interactive features?

**Gender**

Gender is an important predictor of SNS use (Hargittai, 2008). Research on Facebook use has found gender differences for the amount of time participants spend on Facebook and for the number of socially networked friends (Acar, 2008). Parks and Floyd (1996) uncovered a significant difference for men and women in developing relationships online, with women more likely to have formed an online relationship. Sheldon (2008a; 2009) found gender differences in terms of motivations for using Facebook: Females used Facebook more than males to maintain relationships, for entertainment, and to pass time. Other work (e.g., Lin & Atkin, in press) suggests that gender gaps in the adoption and use of SNSs are narrowing. In light of these countervailing trends, we pose the following:

**RQ2:** How does gender influence motives for using Facebook?

The various predictions and research questions, derived from the literature, are graphically displayed in the path model diagram below (see Figure 1). By examining the variables under study with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), we hope to gain a clearer picture of the inter-relationships between communication apprehension, gender, motives for using Facebook, and the use of interactive features. Again, computer-mediated communication apprehension is predicted to negatively influence motives for Facebook use. Since prior research has demonstrated that unwillingness to communicate can influence motives for using Facebook (Sheldon & Honeycutt, 2009), we expect to find a similar influence from communication apprehension on the motives for using Facebook. The literature on news interactive features has demonstrated that motives for online newspaper Web site use are predictors of interactive feature use (Chung & Yoo, 2008). In the model, motives for using Facebook are predicted to influence its interactive features.
The proposed model was used to measure $H_1$–$H_5$ as well as $RQ_1$–$RQ_2$. The model revealed poor measures of fit, $\chi^2 = 632.36$, $df = 13$, $p = .000$, $CFI = .45$, $RMSEA = .34$.

**Method**

**Sample and Procedure**

A cross-sectional study design was implemented in the current study. The sample consisted of 417 undergraduate students who were recruited from a large introductory level course and were awarded course credit for completion of the survey. The sample was both a convenient and purposive one, given that students constitute a large majority of SNS users. The survey was administered online through a third party online survey company, QuestionPro. The questionnaire consisted of measures of apprehension related to CMC activities and Facebook use.

**Measures**

*Computer-mediated Communication Apprehension.*

The scale used to measure computer-mediated communication apprehension was adapted from a study by Wrench and Punyanunt-Carter (2007). The original scale
had 15 items representing e-mail, chat room, and instant messaging apprehension. For the purposes of the current study, five new items were added to reflect SNS apprehension. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The items assessed each type of apprehension by asking if participants felt calm, relaxed, nervous, jittery, and tense. The alpha reliability of the scale was .92 (M = 2.36, SD = .58). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to verify the latent structure of the four factors: e-mail (α = .88, M = 2.34, SD = .91), chat rooms (α = .87, M = 2.56, SD = .87), instant messaging (α = .84, M = 2.07, SD = .79), and social network sites (α = .83, M = 2.11, SD = .81). The four-factor model revealed poor measures of fit initially. Through model re-specification, a new three-factor model was identified which accounts for SNS use. The new measure had an alpha reliability of .90.

Motives for Facebook Use.

The Internet Motives Scale (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000) was adapted for the current study to measure motives for Facebook use. Respondents were asked to identify their motives for using Facebook based on a response scale ranging from (1) not at all to (5) exactly. The four motives from the Internet Motives Scale used in the current study were interpersonal utility, passing time, information seeking, and entertainment. A fifth motive, self-expression was created for the purposes of the current study. Confirmatory factor analysis was also used to verify the latent factors of each motive: entertainment (α = .87, M = 4.15, SD = .65), passing time (α = .84, M = 4.15, SD = .77), information seeking (α = .78, M = 3.14, SD = .74), self-expression (α = .74, M = 3.37, SD = .73), and interpersonal utility (α = .81, M = 3.16, SD = .66). The results of the CFA indicated that some items were loading on the wrong underlying factors. The CFA model for Facebook motives was re-specified. As a result, new measures were created for the interpersonal (α = .80), self-expression (α = .80), and entertainment (α = .86) variables.

Use of Interactive Features.

To measure use of interactive features on Facebook, a scale was adapted from research by Chung and Nah (2009). Respondents were asked to answer questions based on their use of specific interactive features on Facebook on a response scale ranging from (1) not at all to (7) very frequently (M = 4.76, SD = 1.09). The specific features assessed were: status updates, updating one’s profile picture, posting pictures, using the like function, commenting on others’ content, sending messages, chatting, using boxes, using notes, the top news function, the People You May Know function, the search function, audio features, videos features, notifications, events, and top news. The interactive features scale had a reliability of .90. A confirmatory model was also specified for the three underlying factors of the interactive feature scale. The factors were based on the three levels of interactivity (Chung & Yoo, 2008): human (α = .77, M = 4.80, SD = 1.64), medium (α = .70, M = 3.10,
$SD = 1.60$), and human/medium ($\alpha = .82, M = 4.93, SD = 1.28$). The initial model indicated a poor fit that led to model re-specification. All three factors were then combined into a new use of interactive features scale; the alpha reliability of the scale was .89.

Demographics/Facebook Use.

Participants were asked questions pertaining to their gender, age, and grade point average. There were slightly more female participants (53%) than male (47%) in the sample. Participants’ age ranged from 17 to 23 ($M = 18.9, SD = .95$). The majority of participants reported having a grade point average above 3.0 (80.4%). Three items were used to measure time spent on Facebook. The first item asked participants “On a daily basis, how often do you go on Facebook?” The response set ranged from (1) not at all to (7) very frequently ($M = 5.50, SD = 1.56$). The second item asked participants “On a weekly basis, how often do you go on Facebook?” The response set ranged from (1) not at all to (7) very frequently ($M = 5.94, SD = 1.39$). The third item asked “How much time do you usually spend on Facebook per session?” The response set included the following time intervals: (1) 0–15 minutes; (2) 16–30 minutes; (3) 31–45 minutes; (4) 46–60 minutes; (5) 1–2 hours; (6) 2–4 hours; (7) more than 4 hours. Participants most frequently reported spending between 16–30 minutes (37.5%) on Facebook per session followed by spending 0–15 minutes (32.1%) per session.

All of the variables in the study were first analyzed using the correlations procedure in SPSS. VIF statistics were examined and there was no evidence of multicollinearity between the study variables. Structural equation modeling in AMOS 18.0 was used to test each of the six hypotheses and the two research questions.

Results

A correlation test was used to examine the relationships between each of the variables in the study. CMCA was significantly correlated with the interpersonal ($r = -.14, p < .01$), self-expression ($r = -.21, p < .01$), entertainment ($r = -.27, p < .01$), and passing time ($r = -.20, p < .01$) motives. There was a significant correlation between CMCA and use of interactive features ($r = -.24, p < .01$). The use of interactive features was significantly correlated with the information seeking ($r = .28, p < .01$), interpersonal ($r = .42, p < .01$), self-expression ($r = .52, p < .01$), entertainment ($r = .59, p < .01$), and passing time ($r = .38, p < .01$) motives.

H1 predicted that people with higher levels of computer-mediated communication apprehension would be more likely to seek information on Facebook. Results suggested that CMCA was not positively related to information seeking on Facebook ($\beta = -.02, p = .75$). The path coefficient was not significant, leaving H1 without support. H2 stated that CMCA would be inversely related to using Facebook for interpersonal communication. Results indicated that CMCA did significantly decrease
one’s motivation to use Facebook for interpersonal communication ($\beta = -0.15$, $p < .05$), thus supporting H$_2$. The significant path coefficient indicates that H$_2$ is supported.

H$_3$ stated that CMCA would be inversely related to self-expression on Facebook. As predicted, CMCA did decrease one’s motivation for self-expression ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < .001$). As per H$_4$’s prediction that CMCA would be inversely related to using Facebook for entertainment, CMCA was found to be associated with decreased motivation to use Facebook for entertainment ($\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$). Similarly, H$_5$ was also found to have support; computer-mediated communication apprehension was inversely related to the passing time motive ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < .001$). Both hypotheses are thus supported.

The first research question asked which motives for using Facebook would influence the use of interactive features. The interpersonal motive was a significant positive predictor of use of interactive features ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < .05$), as was the self-expression motive ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$), and the entertainment motive ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < .001$). However, the information seeking ($\beta = 0.02$, $p = .98$) and passing time motives ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = .15$) were not significant predictors of use of interactive features. The second research question asked if gender influences motives for using Facebook and was tested with SEM. In the model, gender was shown to predict the entertainment motive ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .001$) and the interpersonal motive ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < .05$). Gender however, failed to predict motives of information seeking ($\beta = -0.01$, $p = .92$), self-expression ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = .23$), or passing time ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = .09$).

Finally, all of the variables under study were analyzed using SEM. Although the measurement model revealed acceptable levels of fit (CFI = .90, RMSEA = .05, $\chi^2 = 2044.14$, df = 1064, $p < .001$), the structural model revealed poor measures of fit. Uses and gratifications theory has recently been used to explain that different needs influence the use of specific interactive features on Facebook (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Smock et al., 2011). Upon re-examination, the model was re-specified (see Figure 2); the new model revealed strong measures of fit (CFI = .99, RMSEA = .04). Computer-mediated communication apprehension was the strongest predictor of the entertainment motive ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < .001$). The model showed that the entertainment motive was a significant predictor of the interpersonal communication ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$), passing time ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < .001$) and self-expression ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$) motives. In addition, gender was a significant predictor of the entertainment motive ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .001$) and the use of interactive features ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < .001$). Finally, the entertainment ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$) and the self-expression ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < .001$) motives both had significant direct effects on the use of interactive features on Facebook.

**Discussion**

This study examined the impact of computer-mediated communication apprehension on motives for using Facebook. Results showed that communication
The re-specified model indicated strong measures of fit at $\chi^2 = 29.08$, $df = 11$, $p = .023$, $CFI = .99$, $RMSEA = .04$.

The re-specified model indicated strong measures of fit at $\chi^2 = 29.08$, $df = 11$, $p = .023$, $CFI = .99$, $RMSEA = .04$.

*p < .05. **p < .001.

Computer-mediated communication apprehension in a computer-mediated context was inversely related to interpersonal communication, self-expression, entertainment, and passing time motives for using Facebook. These findings confirm those found in previous studies (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2007), suggesting that people who are apprehensive about communicating with others “do not get richer” via the social lubricant afforded by CMC—which we extend here to SNS communication—nor do they see it as a vehicle for delivering other media uses and gratifications.

The findings however, do confirm the utility of online use motivations in general, as interpersonal communication, self-expression, and entertainment motives all significantly predicted use of interactive features on Facebook. As seen in previous studies (Sheldon, 2008a), female gender predicted interpersonal and entertainment motives, as well as the use of interactive features. The entertainment motive was shown to be the most powerful predictor of how much time participants spent on Facebook. A path model was created to illustrate the influence of computer-mediated communication apprehension on motives for using Facebook, the influence of motives on each other, and the impact of motives on the use of interactive features.

Computer-mediated communication apprehension was demonstrated to negatively influence one’s motives for using SNSs, especially for interpersonal communi-
cation, entertainment, and self-expression motives. The predictive ability of CMCA was not as strong for the interpersonal communication motive as it was for other motives. However, this finding is important because interpersonal communication is a central aspect of social networking (Ellison et al., 2007). The results indicate that the refined measure of CMCA can be used to measure apprehension in the context of SNSs. The addition of the new items to reflect SNS use apprehension provided strong internal consistency reliability (α = .92).

The current study thus contributes to the nascent research on motives for using Facebook (Zywica & Danowski, 2008). Motives identified in prior literature (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000) were also shown to be motives for Facebook use in the current study, with the exception of information seeking. The entertainment motive for using Facebook was the most salient here, followed by the passing time motive, all of which is consistent with findings from previous research (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). The entertainment motive had the highest average score for the sample; this finding is different from that of Sheldon (2008a), who found relationship maintenance to be the most salient factor, followed by passing time. This indicates that Facebook is initially used for interpersonal communication and then probably as a source of entertainment, thus demonstrating that motives for SNS use change over time. Such findings seem parsimonious, given that the repertoire of available features and user base both evolve over time (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2008).

The model specified through SEM indicates that entertainment is a significant predictor of interpersonal communication, passing time, and self-expression. This implies that individuals use Facebook primarily for entertainment while all other motives are secondary. Interpersonal communication and passing time have been identified as Facebook motives in past studies (Sheldon, 2008b); however, the significance of the self-expression motive does warrant further explanation. People post “status updates” to the news feed on Facebook for many different reasons. Although it is beyond the scope of the current study, the self-expression motive does offer some explanation for why people might post their feelings, their opinion, or an image to their socially networked friends. If individuals are using Facebook for entertainment purposes, this differs from cases where it’s being used to maintain relationships. For example, individuals may use Facebook in a similar fashion to a blog or to promote their viewpoints.

Study results also extend past work on general Web site use (Chung & Nah, 2009; Chung & Yoo, 2008) to the realm of SNSs, suggesting that entertainment was the strongest predictor of interactive feature use, followed by self-expression. This finding makes logical sense in that individuals are more likely to view videos, photos, or play games if they are using Facebook to be entertained. By the same
token, individuals engaged in self-expression are more likely to take advantage of Facebook's interactive features. Taken together, these findings underscore the convergence of mass and interpersonal communication functions facilitated by the Internet (Lin, 2008). By examining the interactive features of Facebook, this study contributes to the understanding of how people use Facebook beyond how many hours they spend on the site or how often they update their status. This lends support for the position that SNSs could be conceptualized as a “collection of tools” (Smock et al., 2011, p. 2323).

Gender was shown to be a significant predictor of interactive feature use; male users were less likely to use interactive features on Facebook. The same gender difference is present for the interpersonal and entertainment motives. Female users reported using Facebook for the interpersonal communication and entertainment motives more than males, both findings of which are consistent with Sheldon’s (2008a) research. The negative influence of computer-mediated communication apprehension on motives for using SNS has important societal implications. Computer-mediated communication apprehension could affect who uses SNSs and how they do so. This is becoming more important as people are developing technological abilities through SNSs (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), and they are being used for a wider variety of purposes. Online course management, online newspapers, and other Web-based media incorporate many of the same features as SNSs, and computer-mediated communication apprehension could present a problem in other online contexts. Often, when organizations or groups decide to use SNSs, trait differences in communicators are not taken into account. This study however, has shown that differences in trait-like communication behaviors do have consequential effects.

Limitations

Although Facebook was initially designed to serve a college community (Ellison et al., 2007), given that roughly half of Americans use SNSs (Lin & Atkin, in press), this study would have benefitted from a more externally valid sample. Study results would also be strengthened by a wider consideration of the types of interactivity that are influenced by motives for using Facebook. Chung and Yoo (2008) suggested that the various interactive features on news sites could be broken down by type of interactive features: human, medium, or human/medium features. Future research would benefit by applying the computer-mediated communication apprehension measure used in this study across a wider range of SNS platforms (e.g., professional networks like LinkedIn, or others targeted at specific demographic subgroups such as BlackPlanet). As Hargittai (2008) suggests, the choice of SNS that an individual uses is often based on their background and cultural influences.

The impact of CMCA should be studied in context-specific SNSs, such as dating sites (e.g., Match.com), perhaps in conjunction with communication competence, willingness to communicate, compulsive communication, and shyness. Although the current study indicated some of the motives for using Facebook and other
SNSs, later work should focus on emerging applications as they come online. Later work might also profitably apply computer-mediated communication apprehension to different motives for Facebook use, such as virtual community or relationship maintenance (Sheldon, 2008b). Researchers would benefit from more exploratory treatments of SNS use—particularly those tailored to the online context—rather than restricting themselves to previously identified motives.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that computer-mediated communication apprehension negatively influences online communication on SNSs. The explanatory power of our model underscores the utility of considering the various interactive features available on SNSs in later such work. The present results also extend research on Internet motives and support an integrative model conceptualizing communication apprehension in the context of uses and gratifications theory.

Note

Communication apprehension is a negative trait in American culture, as the trait could complicate one’s aspirations for social desirability (e.g., Levine & McCroskey, 1990).

References


