SELF-DISCLOSURE ON ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS: MOTIVES, CONTEXT FEATURE, AND MEDIA CAPABILITIES

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

On online social networks (OSNs) such as Facebook and Twitter, the massive self-disclosure has attracted the attention of both academic researchers and marketers. Despite of the impressive scope of this phenomenon, few studies have systematically studied why people self disclose so much on OSNs; let alone what context feature or media capabilities within OSNs will influence people's voluntary self-disclosure behavior. In this study, we propose a theory-grounded model to better understand people's self-disclosure behavior on OSNs. Three leading motives (i.e., relationship development, social validation, and self-expression) are identified. In addition, we carefully investigate the moderating effects of the specific online social network context feature (i.e., anonymity) and media capabilities (i.e., reprocessability, symbol sets) on the relationships between the three motives and self-disclosure behavior. Thereby, this provides theoretical contributions for online human behavior research and practical implications for OSNs providers, policymakers and OSNs participants.

Keywords: Online social networks, self-disclosure, motives, anonymity, media capabilities
Introduction

Online social networks (OSNs) (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) are gaining increasing popularity among people. For instance, Facebook alone has more than 800 million registered users (Facebook.com 2012) while Twitter has more than 140 million of active users (Twitter.com 2012). OSNs are online platforms where people can present themselves by setting their online profiles, share personal information with vast networks of friends-and, often, unknown numbers of strangers-and make social connections (Ellison 2007). Though prior literature indicates that people are reluctant to disclose personal information because of privacy concerns (e.g., monetary loss, safety threatening) (Awad and Krishnan 2006; Chellappa and Sin 2005; Gross and Acquisti 2005; Krasnova et al. 2010), a huge amount of information is still disclosed everyday on these OSNs. Among these information, most is personal information disclosed by users ranging from ordinary information (e.g., music preference, movie choice) to very intimate information (e.g., relationship status, sex preference) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). For instance, more than half of the Facebook users reported having found out something very important about others from their profiles (Tufekci and Spence 2007). Why do people voluntarily disclose themselves so much on online social networks? What are the motives behind this kind of behavior?

Recently, there have been many studies study self-disclosure behavior adopting interpersonal theories developed in the psychology literature (Awad and Krishnan 2006; Benford et al. 2006; Chellappa and Sin 2005). The shared feature of these studies is that they focus on the privacy issues related to self-disclosure in online commercial contexts (i.e., B2C contexts) rather than online social networks where excessive self-disclosure is taking place. No study has been systematically studied why people voluntarily self disclose so much on OSNs without external rewards (e.g., monetary incentives, personalized services) provided. Besides, OSN-related literature has yet to take the impact of OSNs media characteristics on self-disclosure behavior into consideration. Online social networks represent environments with significantly distinctive characteristics (Walther 2007). We believe that some media capabilities embedded in OSNs as well as some context feature within OSNs will exert significant influence on people’s online self-disclosure behavior. For instance, The media capability (e.g., reprocessability) which reflects people’s privacy control will significantly influence people’s self-disclosure behavior as prior studies already indicate that privacy risk is always a big concern of OSN users (Krasnova et al. 2010). Therefore, in this study, we not only carefully examine the important psychological motivational criteria that encourage people to self disclose on OSNs, but also take the online social network context feature and media capabilities into consideration and look into their impacts on people’s self-disclosure behavior.

The recent explosion in social networking sites has not only attracted the attention of the academy, but also attracted considerable interest of the industry players, policymakers, and users themselves. The disclosed personal information is valuable marketing resources. Many companies are already using social networking sites to collect consumers’ data for marketing purpose (Kozinets 2002; Muniz Jr and O’guinn 2001). By utilizing the consumers’ disclosed personal information (e.g., personal interests, shopping habits), companies are able to build up brand communities on OSNs and promote online personalized services (e.g., personalized advertising).

Some anecdotal evidence suggests that the commercial evaluation of OSNs is based on the active user participation rather than actual financial performance (Krasnova et al. 2010). Excessive self-disclosure represents people’s active participation behavior to a large extent. Through this study, the OSNs providers can better understand their customers and offer corresponding services to encourage users’ self-disclosure behavior, so as to increase their OSNs commercial values. Besides, the OSNs application developers can also benefit from our results to provide relevant applications (e.g., profile embellishment) that cater to users’ self-disclosure behavior. By this way, they can generate more revenue and large user database. Additionally, this study can help OSNs users better understand themselves and increase self-knowledge (e.g., why we want to disclose), as well as better know the OSNs environments, so that they can make better decisions (e.g., what appropriate information to disclose) and conduct self-disclosure more strategically. Last but not the least, the study provides implications for Internet policymakers and facilitates them to make better Internet policies to regulate users’ behavior on OSNs.
Theoretical Background

Self-disclosure is traditionally defined as ‘any message about the self that an individual communicates to another’ (Cozby 1973; Wheeless 1978). Although it has been usually discussed in the offline development of close relationship (e.g., marriage, family relationship), both experimental and anecdotal evidence suggests that computer-mediated communication (CMC) and general Internet-based behavior contain high levels of disclosure (Rheingold 2000; Wallace 2001). On online social networks, people not only disclose personal identifiable information (e.g., name, gender, occupation, email address), but also reveal other private information such as hobbies, tastes in books, life attitude and relationship status, almost anything that goes on in their life (Gross and Acquisti 2005; Java et al. 2007; Krasnova et al. 2010).

Disclosure Decision-Making Models

The theoretical background of self-disclosure goes back to social penetration theory. According to social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor 1973; Taylor et al. 1969), self-disclosure is a type of communication through which individuals make themselves known to other people and, when others reciprocate by sharing personal information, leads to relational development and increased intimacy. In other words, self-disclosure is a critical component of interpersonal intimacy development process.

Based on the social penetration theory that gives us a general idea of why people self disclose in social environments, Derlega and Grzelak (1979) suggest the disclosure decision-making models which discuss self-disclosure in a functional perspective. Five motives haven been identified and they are shown in Table 1. According to this theory, disclosure behavior is by nature a strategic behavior, which can be used to influence or act on their social environments (Derlega and Grzelak 1979).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Development</td>
<td>Promote a close or intimate relationship with another person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Validation</td>
<td>Increase general liking and social acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Expression</td>
<td>Release personal emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Control</td>
<td>Occur in situations to manipulate the behaviors of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Clarification</td>
<td>Obtain feedbacks to help define self concepts (i.e., self understanding)</td>
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Self-Disclosure Motives on OSNs

**Relationship development** has long been identified as an primary factor which encourages people’s self-disclosure behavior (Altman and Taylor 1973; Cozby 1973; Schlenker 1980). And self-disclosure is believed to be a good way to achieve intimate and close relationship (Collins & Miller, 1994). People disclose their information to achieve trust and understanding from others. With increased trust and shared understanding, the relationships are more likely to become closer, depending on the different relationship phases and personalities(Altman and Taylor 1973; Derlega and Grzelak 1979).

Though to date little research has systematically studied the benefits of self-disclosure on social network sites, some initial thoughts have already suggested that social capital is an important goal of people’s self-disclosure behavior(Ellison et al. 2006; Ellison et al. 2007; Gibbs et al. 2006). Ellison et al. (2007) has identified that social capital is the most important reason why college students actively participate in Facebook. Broadly speaking, social capital refers to the resources accumulated through the relationships among people(Coleman 1988). The ability to form and maintain relationships with others is a necessary precondition for the accumulation of social capital. Therefore, the need of relationship development is reflected in the pursuit of social capital. As mentioned before, OSNs represent online environments where people get connected with others and conduct social interactions. People primarily join OSNs to strengthen their social bonds (e.g., maintain old relationships, build new relationships). Synchronizing the evidences from both offline and online environments, we believe that relationship management will still play an important role in motivating people’s voluntary self-disclosure behavior on OSNs.
**Social validation** disclosure involves self-disclosure to increase general liking and social acceptance. According to the theories of self-presentation (Baumeister and Leary 1995), the default goal for almost all the individuals is social approval. If no other social reward is immediately salient, people generally strive to be accepted and liked by others. In Petronio’s (2002) model which focuses on the boundary of privacy, gaining social approval from others is identified as an essential motivational criterion for disclosure when managing the dialectic between self-disclosure and privacy. In social networking sites, though there are many differences (e.g., relatively high anonymity) compared to offline environment, people still disclose their information to seek for liking and acceptance from others, no matter it’s from good friends or just strangers (Gibbs et al. 2006; Livingstone 2008; Walther 2007). Since then, social validation, as the default goal of human beings living in social communities, is believed to still work as an important motive of people’s voluntary self-disclosure behavior.

**Self-expression** hypothesis suggests that self-disclosing may be a self-rewarding activity, satisfying the expression need of the individual. The self-expression need makes people want to express their own feelings, emotions, and thoughts, so as to support healthy function. Through self-expression, or emotion relief, people enjoy psychological well-being (e.g., mental health) and experience pleasant inner states (Cozby 1973; Jourard 1959; Jourard 1964). Since the act of self-disclosure itself is such a good and effective way to fulfill self-expression need, people’s self-disclosure act will be easily initiated by the need of self-expression. Although, to avoid misunderstanding, it should be made clear that self-expression does not equal self-disclosure. For example, writing a private diary can also fulfill people’s self-expression need, while it is not self-disclosure behavior. It is easy to notice that most users on OSNs express their different kinds of feelings (e.g., happy, disappointed), emotions (e.g., depression), and thoughts (e.g., political opinions, life attitude) many times a day (Java et al. 2007). Therefore, we consider that on OSNs, people are also motivated by self-expression need to conduct self-disclosure.

**Social control**, or self presentation, as stated above, is to intentionally regulate personal behaviors to manipulate others’ impression. Goffman (1959) terms this effortful process as impression management. People may choose to reveal or withhold information depending on how heavily they rely on disclosure to obtain their goals (Leary and Kowalski 1990; Omarzu 2000). We can infer that it is the different goals behind this manipulation behavior rather the manipulation itself that motivate self-disclosure activities. According to Livingstone (2008), teenagers who are the major component of social networking sites users often made deliberate choices before disclosing personal information and this strategic behavior origins from different motivations (e.g., social validation, relationship development). Since then, social control itself is more likely describing the strategic process of self-disclosure (e.g., what to disclose, how to disclose, disclose to whom) rather than the direct motive which encourages people’s voluntary self-disclosure behavior.

**Self-clarification** is discussed in the functional theory that people may self-disclose to increase self-knowledge and better understandings of themselves. According to Derlega and Grzelak (1979), the act of self-disclosing may allow one to more clearly perceive and understand internal, nonvisible states. It is a more self-oriented and cognition-oriented behavior. Compared to other motives discussed above, self-clarification disclosure focuses on one’s more “private side”. It concerns the disclosure of more intimate and private personal information. On online social networks which are developed for social networking with others, on the one hand, people are more easily to be motivated by social-oriented and leisure-oriented reasons to conduct self-disclosure behavior; On the other hand, the risks of disclosing such intimate personal information would be quite high (e.g., social rejection). There is less chance that they conduct self-disclosure to achieve self-understanding within OSNs, compared to other motives mentioned before. The prior preliminary studies have provided little evidence of such self-clarification disclosure behavior (Krasnova et al. 2010; Livingstone 2008). Hence, in this study, self-clarification is not considered as a salient motive of people’s self-disclosure behavior on OSNs.

**Anonymity in Computer-Mediated Environment**

While the motives directly encourage people’s self-disclosure behavior on OSNs, the OSN contexts also influence this self-disclosure behavior to a large extent. Anonymity is central to most explanations of both pro- and anti-social CMC behavior, including self-disclosure (Joinson 2001; Walther 1996; Walther 2007). It refers to the extent one is relatively anonymous or non-identifiable in individual or group interactions on the Internet (Joinson 2001). Because of the relative anonymity that online interactions
offer, the risks of self-disclosure (e.g., social disapproval, image damage) may be greatly reduced, disclosers should be much less fearful of potential condemnation or rejection (McKenna and Bargh 1998). It is just like the famous phenomenon of “strangers on a train” (Rubin 1975). As with the stranger on a strain to whom we might disclosure quite intimate information, there is little fear that the information we disclose will get back to the offline social circles.

Generally, anonymity concerns both objective aspects of the medium and subjective perceptions about the degree of anonymity shared within an environment (Qian and Scott 2007). In prior studies, it is often discussed from a media perspective (e.g., technology affordance). In this study, we discuss the anonymity as the subjectively perceived identifiability within OSNs. Because in nowadays online environments, almost all kinds of platforms shared the same anonymity capability, it is the self-perceived identifiability that matters and directly influences users’ online behavior. Different OSNs share different levels of anonymity norms. For instance, on some OSNs (e.g., Twitter), people can use fake names or pseudonymous to cover their real identity, whereas on some other OSNs (e.g., Facebook), the shared atmosphere there is that people use real names to present themselves. Moreover, different people may perceive different degrees of identifiability even within a same online social network.

Previous online behavior studies examining the relationship between anonymity and self-disclosure have generated conflicting results (Qian and Scott 2007). We argue that anonymity, which revolves around the social contexts, should be considered as a contextual factor that moderates the relationships between motives and self-disclosure behavior. And the moderating effect will differ when people are motivated by different motives towards self-disclosure.

*Media Synchronicity Theory*

Online social networks stand for the online environments where people can present themselves through their online individual profiles, get connected to other users and conduct social interactions (Gross and Acquisti 2005). The profiles can include any type of information including texts, photos, audio files and videos (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Prior studies suggest that both social and technological forces shape user practice (Bargh et al. 2002; Walther 1996). The specific media capabilities embedded in OSNs may have big impacts on people’s voluntary self-disclosure behavior. As online social network is a major component of social media, we adopt the theoretical lens of media synchronicity to better investigate the relevant media capabilities (i.e., technological affordance).

Media Synchronicity Theory (MST) focuses on the ability of media to support synchronicity, a shared pattern of coordinated behavior among individuals as they work together (Dennis et al. 2008). Synchronicity is a state in which actions move at the same rate and exactly together (Stein and Urdang 1973). This theory is a theory of communication performance rather than media choice, which has been widely used to describe and evaluate media capabilities. Five media capabilities are identified to influence the development of synchronicity, as shown in Table 2.

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<th><strong>Table 2. Media Capabilities from Media Synchronicity Theory</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Media Capability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbol Sets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reprocessability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parallelism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transmission Velocity</td>
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<td>Rehearsability</td>
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Transmission velocity is crucial for supporting collaborative working patterns. Media that are high in transmission velocity allow messages to be transmitted faster and reach the recipients as soon as they are sent. Higher transmission velocity supports synchronicity as it improves work coordination. However, OSNs are places where people enjoy leisure social interactions and entertainments, rather than complete work tasks. The users’ requirement of transmission velocity is not that high as compared to cooperative work condition. With the fast advancement of modern information technology, most digital information is transmitted through Internet in seconds. A small difference of 1s or 2s does not affect anything. So we believe transmission velocity exerts little influence on people’s behavior within OSNs, especially self-disclosure act.

Parallelism is also very important for people’s collaborative working style. It is used to depict the width of the medium (Rice 1987). It discusses the extent to which signals from multiple senders can be transmitted over the medium at the same time. However, the default design of online social networks is that the disclosed information can be seen by all the audiences within the social network simultaneously and users can see all the recent information posted by their friends on their news wall at the same time when they log in the OSN. In other words, the nature of OSNs is already an online platform with quite high parallelism. Therefore, the parallelism capability becomes the default function element and shared by all OSNs and does not influence people’s self-disclosure that much.

Rehearsability is shared by almost all the computer-mediated technologies. In offline environment, people also rehearse their sentences before they speak it out so that to carry out their impression management strategy (Goffman 1959). We believe that rehearsability is not that relevant when people conduct their self-disclosure within OSNs.

Symbol sets, as stated above, refers the different ways (e.g., text, photos) in which a medium allows people to communicate with others (SHANNON-WEAVER 1963). The essence of communication and language is symbols (Littlejohn and Foss 2007). Human can use a myriad of different types of symbols to communicate (Mead 1967; Rogers 1986). On OSNs, such as Facebook, profile has become the major means of identity presentation and the place to conduct self-disclosure. Users can use plain texts, photos, voice message, and video to strategically disclose personal information and present themselves while these digital symbols are usually unavailable in offline environment. On the one hand, more available symbol sets makes disclosure more interesting and enjoyable; on the other hand, it enables users to communicate through a flexible and personalized way(Ellison 2007). With different symbol sets provided by different online social network platforms, users’ self-disclosure behavior will change to some extent.

Reprocessability represents the media capability which enables the recipient to reexamine or process a sender’s message again (Sproull et al. 1992). It allows a recipient to spend more time decoding message by revisiting prior message for additional consideration (Nunamaker et al. 1991). The higher reprocessability a media has (e.g., email), the more information accesses and higher editability given to recipients, the less privacy and information control senders own. If the reprocessability is relatively high, the media synchronicity decreases. The recipients have more opportunities to visit the same piece of information disclosed by the sender, which leads the sender to have less control of the disclosed information. As people are granted more capabilities to control (e.g., revise, delete) disclosed personal information, either self-generated (e.g., an impulsively uploaded photo showing drunk in a party) or generated by others (e.g., unfriendly or inappropriate comments received), the information reprocessability decreases. In other words, the audience within the OSNs has little chance to reprocess the exactly same piece of information one person provided before. In today’s online social environment, lots of information is updated in seconds, and people are in an information overload environment with less attention allocated to each piece of information (Bargh and Thein 1985; Jones et al. 2004). Many privacy risks may take place when receivers revisit the piece of information. We believe that the privacy risk is not the same for reading the message once and many times.

In other words, reprocessability indirectly reflects the privacy control given to users. If the disclosed information on a user’s profile could be reexamined by others without any control, he or she will feel less privacy control and are less likely to self disclose on OSNs. Many prior studies of OSNs has emphasized that the main concern of online self-disclosure is the potential privacy risks (Chellappa and Sin 2005; Gross and Acquisti 2005; Malhotra et al. 2004). Therefore, it is believed that reprocessability will influence people’s voluntary self-disclosure activities within online social networks.
Research Model and Hypotheses

Based on the above literature review, we formulate the research model shown in Figure 1. The model suggests that relationship management, social validation, and self expression are the essential motives of OSNs users' voluntary self-disclosure behavior. It also suggests that symbol sets, reprocessability, and anonymity are the three relevant moderators which interact with these three motives.

Figure 1. Research Model

Different from other online communities, such as collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia) and content communities (e.g., YouTube, Flicker), the fundamental characteristic of OSNs is their concentration on social networking. By being connected to a wide range of people, users gain the opportunity to accumulate social capital (e.g., friendship, useful information, good employment connection). Prior studies have already proved that self-disclosure is an effective way to build and improve interpersonal relationship in both offline and online environments (Collins and Miller 1994; Gibbs et al. 2006). When a user discloses information, he or she sends desired signals to others to initiate communication. We consider relationship development works as an important factor that motivates people to self disclose on OSNs.

We take the moderating effects of anonymity and reprocessability into consideration. Symbol sets, which refers to expression ways, is not considered as an important moderator here. Because no matter how rich the symbol sets is, the effectiveness of self-disclosure to fulfill relationship development need does not change much. When an OSN is perceived to be more anonymous, within this OSN, people around you are less identifiable. The effectiveness of self disclosing to gain useful relationships (e.g., have material impact on offline environment) decreases. The increased extent of self-disclosure between high need and low need of relationship development shrinks. Reprocessability also works as a moderator exerting a negative impact on the positive effect of relationship development on self-disclosure behavior. With lower reprocessability, people can better manage their online profiles, which leads to higher privacy and image control. And this increased control will boost the performance of self-disclosure to achieve good social bonds. If an OSN provides high reprocessability, even relationship development need increases quite a lot, people may not disclose that more information because of the increased concern of privacy and image issues, compared to when an OSN provides low reprocessability. Thus, we hypothesize as:

H1: The need of relationship development is positively related to self-disclosure within OSNs.
H1a: When an OSN is perceived to be more anonymous, the positive effect of relationship development on self-disclosure becomes weaker.
H1b: When an OSN provides higher reprocessability, the positive effect of relationship development on self-disclosure becomes weaker.
Getting likings and social approval is discussed as the default goal of human beings in social communities (Baumeister and Leary 1995). To achieve social acceptance and supports, people regulate their behaviors on the basis of social norms and rules to present the desired public identity. And usually, self presentation is done through self-disclosure(Goffman 1959; Schlenker 1975). Prior studies suggest that on OSNs, most people especially young teenagers disclose personal information for nice comments which show the supports and compliments from others(Livingstone 2008). Hence, in this study, we include social validation as a significant factor motivating people’s self-disclosure behavior on OSNs.

When an OSN is perceived to be more anonymous, the relationship between social validation and self-disclosure becomes weaker. People enjoy identity ambiguity and gain more freedom from social rules (e.g., being friendly and supportive). The recipients are less likely to just give nice feedbacks without considering what their real opinions are. That is to say, they are more likely to reply unwelcomed comments (e.g., disapproval, criticism) and are more likely to not reply (e.g., being an passer-by), because of less burden on the need of managing relationships. Thus, disclosing personal information to achieve social validation is not that effective compared to when less anonymous atmosphere shared within an OSN. The effect of social validation on self-disclosure becomes weaker. As the same logic stated above, when an OSN provides high reprocessability, people have more privacy and image management concern. With social validation need increases, people may not increase their self-disclosure behavior that much, compared to when an OSN provides low reprocessability. Symbol sets is also not considered as an important moderator adjusting the relationship between social validation and self-disclosure. We believe that the richness of symbol sets has little impact on the effective of self-disclosure to satisfy social validation need.

H2: The need of social validation is positively related to self-disclosure within OSNs.

H2a: When an OSN is perceived to be more anonymous, the positive effect of social validation on self-disclosure becomes weaker.

H2b: When an OSN provides higher reprocessability, the positive effect of social validation on self-disclosure becomes weaker.

Self-expression suggests that people have a need of expressing their feelings, emotions, and thoughts. And it is believed to be beneficial for subjective well beings (Cozby 1973; Jourard 1959; Jourard 1964). By sharing happiness and releasing stress, people will experience a healthier inner state. Prior studies have shown that people express all kinds of their feeling, emotions, ideas, and opinions on OSNs (Java et al. 2007). As self-disclosure is such a good and effective way to fulfill self-expression need, we suggest self-expression is an important motive of people’s self-disclosure behavior on OSNs.

When an OSN is perceived to be more anonymous, people can present themselves in a more ambiguous way and enjoy more expression freedom. With such expression freedom, the emotions (e.g., angry) and other opinions (e.g., condemn) which people want to express but hesitate to express because of the related social risks, are more likely to be revealed in this kind of OSN, which leads to better fulfillment of self-expression need. Hence, the increase of self-expression need will lead to a larger increase of self-disclosure, compared to when an OSN perceived to be less anonymous. While higher anonymity grants people more expression freedom, higher reprocessability constrains the expression freedom. With higher reprocessability, disclosed information will be more easily to be rechecked by others, which leads to higher social risks (e.g., penalty within workplace, disapproval from parents). Even with a large increase of self-expression need, self-disclosure does not experience that large increase because of the severe privacy and image concern, as compared to when an OSN provides low reprocessability.

The moderating effect of symbol sets cannot be ignored on this relationship. Symbol sets represents the ways people can use to express themselves. The more symbol sets an OSN provides, people can express their feelings, emotions, and thoughts in more ways. They can relieve their emotions through texts, photos, voice message, video, or any combination of them. More symbol sets not only make the disclosure experience more interesting and interactive, but also facilitate people to disclose personal feelings, emotions, and thoughts in a more precise and flexible way. In other words, with more symbol sets, the effectiveness of self-disclosure to satisfy self-expression need increases. When an OSN provides more symbol sets, with self-expression need increases, people will behave with a positively steeper change in self-disclosure compared to when smaller symbol sets provided.
H3: The need of self-expression is positively related to self-disclosure within OSNs.

H3a: When an OSN is perceived to be more anonymous, the positive effect of self-expression on self-disclosure becomes stronger.

H3b: When an OSN provides higher reprocessability, the positive effect of self-expression on self-disclosure becomes weaker.

H3c: When an OSN provides more symbol sets, the positive effect of self-expression on self-disclosure becomes stronger.

Discussion

To date, the bulk of online social network research has focused on impression management and friendship performance, network structure, online/offline connections, and privacy issues (Ellison 2007). The excessive self-disclosure phenomenon has not been systematically investigated. This study provides a model which identifies three important motivating criteria (i.e., relationship management, social validation, and self-expression) of people’s voluntary self-disclosure behavior on online social networks. The context feature (i.e., anonymity) and media capabilities (i.e., reprocessability, symbol sets) have also been investigated to better depict the relationships between motives and self-disclosure behavior, which has yet to be carefully examined. By identifying the essential motives and moderating effects within online social network platforms, this study provides important theoretical implications for online self-disclosure research and contributes to the exploration of Internet psychology.

Additionally, it provides empirical implications for industry players, policymakers, and OSN users. For instance, it enables OSN providers to better understand their users' self-disclosure motives and provide better social networking services (e.g., richer symbol sets, higher profile control, corresponding anonymity atmosphere), so that their OSNs could attract more users and generate more marketing value. As reprocessability is identified to have a large impact on people’ self-disclosure behavior on OSNs, more theoretical and empirical research should be done to figure out what dimensions represents reprocessability and how it can be restricted (e.g., multiple layers of audience control) without harming the social networking opportunities within OSNs.
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