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Literature review:
Factors and attitudes that shape personal use of social media

Martin Ponce
Student 10371381

Tutor: Dr. Mark Brogan

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1 Introduction

Facebook is one of today's leading Social Networking Sites (SNS). The company reports that as of June 2014, their network serves 1.32 billion users per month ([Facebook, 2014](#)), while independent studies have shown that SNS users were more likely to be using Facebook ([Hampton & Goulet, 2011](#); [Hargittai, 2007](#); [Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008](#)). As Facebook expanded registration to users outside educational and professional institutions in September 2006 ([Facebook, 2014](#)), males and females alike were quick to adopt the technology at a fast paced rate ([Mazman & Usluel, 2011](#)). This adoption rate has triggered a multitude of scientific research "from widely different fields of inquiry", attempting to explain the phenomenon of Facebook ([Caers et al., 2013](#), p. 983).

This literature review focuses on research which examine the demographic differences relating to SNS use, with particular attention to the role of gender. Men are generally regarded as earlier adopters of technology compared to women. This is evident in findings by [Pitkow and Recker \(1994\)](#), where 95% of Internet users were men, while [Kimbrough, Guadagno, Muscanell, and Dill \(2013, p. 896\)](#) declares that during the first half of the 1990's, the Internet "was mostly regarded as a technological boy's toy". Research by [Fogel and Nehmad \(2009\)](#) demonstrates that men are also earlier adopters of SNS, finding that more men had established SNS accounts before women. However, the trend has shifted, with recent reports indicating that women now represent the majority of SNS users compared to men ([Duggan & Brenner, 2013](#); [Hampton & Goulet, 2011](#)).

As the Internet user gender gap disappears, it is more important than ever to understand the differences between genders and its effects relating to personal SNS use, so that current social network sites and social network sites of the future are able to service both men and women equally. This literature review will explore those differences as expressed in the body of current research literature, by analysing the following topics:

- Motivational differences between genders
- Self-presentation differences between genders
- Difference in SNS privacy concerns between genders

2 Literature Review: Gender roles in SNS use

Fallows (2005) compared American male and female Internet users and found that men were more likely to use the Internet in general for information gathering purposes, while women were more likely to use the Internet for social applications to maintain current relationships. According to the literature in this review, this statement also translates to the use of SNS such as Facebook.

2.1 Social gender role theory and gender motivations

Eagly's (1987) theory of social gender roles introduces a framework to explain differences in gender, regardless of online or offline behaviour, which underpins many cyber-psychology studies (Hum et al., 2011; Kimbrough et al., 2013; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014). This theory characterizes men as "*agentic* providers" and women as "*communal* caregivers" (Hum et al., 2011, p. 1830). In other words, according to this theory, men tend to develop traits which lend to task-based activities, while women tend to develop traits which lend to social interactions. The theory of social gender roles can be used to explain the differences between gender in SNS use, such as Fallows's (2005) generalisation that men use the Internet for information gathering purposes, and women use the Internet for social applications.

2.1.1 Male gender role and motivations

Widely cited research by Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) was among the first to examine the impact of SNS on college students and observed that men, compared to women, were more likely to use SNS to find out about events, indicating that men spend more time than women performing information-gathering activities on SNS. In support of this view, Choi and Kim (2014, p. 2) state that men have higher positive attitudes towards SNS advertising than women, as men are more likely to perceive such advertising as "useful information" due to their "information-oriented motivation". Such evidence supports Eagly's (1987) social gender theory. On the other hand, Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) argues by claiming that women were more likely to use Facebook Groups for obtaining information. However, this study only examines the use of Facebook *Groups* and not Facebook as a whole.

In comparison to women using SNS as a medium to maintain existing relationships, men have been found to use SNS as a tool for creating new relationships and expanding their networks (Mazman & Usluel, 2011). This view is supported by findings in research by Muscanell and Guadagno (2012), Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) and Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, and Kruck (2012), which illustrates that men are more likely to use SNS for dating purposes than women. These findings iterate a difference in motivation of SNS use between genders.

2.1.2 Female gender role and motivations

In contrast, Mazman and Usluel (2011) and Muscanell and Guadagno (2012) both assert that women were more likely to seek out old friends on the network, and are more likely to utilise SNS communication tools to maintain existing relationships. To support this statement, Joiner et al. (2014) provides evidence that women are more likely to demonstrate higher emotional support in response to a friend's negative

Facebook status update. Women are also twice as likely to respond publicly to a negative status update when compared to men (Joiner et al., 2014, p. 167). These statements lend to the notion that women use SNS as a tool for relationship maintenance more than men. The evidence presents a difference in motivations of SNS use between genders which align with Eagly's (1987) theory of gender social roles, as cited by Kimbrough et al. (2013).

2.2 Alternative theory

2.3 Criticisms

It is worth noting that studies by Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008), Muscanell and Guadagno (2012) and Joiner et al. (2014) were limited to participants from a single American college comprised of first-year undergraduate students who provided self-reported estimates. Interestingly, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) and Joiner et al. (2014) gathered data from respondents via paper questionnaires, as opposed to Mazman and Usluel's (2011) and Muscanell and Guadagno's (2012) online questionnaire method. Online questionnaires have the potential to skew results towards users who may spend more time online, possibly use SNS more, and have higher competency in SNS use, compared to those who spend less time online (Hargittai, 2007, p. 280).

Competency in SNS use, otherwise classed as "Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) Competency" by Ross et al. (2009, p. 579), was a variable largely ignored in most of the research within the scope of this review, which could "influence how much people use social networking sites" (Kimbrough et al., 2013, p. 898). Without the measurement of CMC competency, it is only assumed that all participants of such studies are equally skilled in the use and application of SNS, which certainly may not be the case, as Ross et al. (2009) suggests.

Choi and Kim's (2014) research provides a unique perspective in the role of gender in Facebook use, comparing the relationship of self-presentation on brand-related word-of-mouth and gender's moderating effects. According to Choi and Kim (2014), only a small amount of research has been completed in the area of brand-related word-of-mouth on SNS. However, this study was limited to participants from the same country, providing self-reported estimates. The study was also limited to respondents within the ages of nineteen to thirty-nine, as Choi and Kim (2014, p. 3) claims that age bracket represented the "primary Facebook user population".

Haferkamp et al.'s (2012) research was based on randomly selected users from *StudiVZ* (2014), a German SNS for students. At the time of research in 2010, the majority of StudiVZ profiles were public and "used without privacy settings" (Haferkamp et al., 2012, p. 92), which allowed the study of observed data from participant profiles, together with self-reported online questionnaire results. Although Haferkamp et al.'s (2012) research utilized observed data from respondents from another country while using a completely unique SNS, the results were consistent with most of the literature in this review. However, access to public user profiles allowed Haferkamp et al. (2012) to analyse gender differences in profile photo preference.

2.4 Gender role and self-presentation

2.4.1 Profile photos

Through the analysis of observed public SNS profiles, [Haferkamp et al. \(2012\)](#) found that men and women demonstrated differences in selecting their profile photo. Men preferred

3 Literature Review

3.1 Motivational differences

3.1.1 Women use FB for relationship maintenance more than men

- [Kimbrough et al. \(2013\)](#)
- [Muscanell and Guadagno \(2012\)](#)
- [Raacke and Bonds-Raacke \(2008\)](#)
- [Mazman and Usluel \(2011\)](#)
 - Women more likely to look for old friends

3.1.2 Women compare themselves with other people more than men

- [McAndrew and Jeong \(2012\)](#)
- [Choi and Kim \(2014\)](#)
- [Fogel and Nehmad \(2009\)](#)
- [Haferkamp et al. \(2012\)](#)
 - Women more likely to look at others' profiles to find out more about that person
 - Women more likely to compare themselves with others more often than men

3.1.3 Men use FB to create new relationships more than women

- [Mazman and Usluel \(2011\)](#)
- Might not include this sub-subheading, or merge with another

3.1.4 Men use FB for information-gathering purposes more than women

- [Raacke and Bonds-Raacke \(2008\)](#)
- [Choi and Kim \(2014\)](#)
 - Men are more open to advertising on FB than women
- [Muscanell and Guadagno \(2012\)](#), see quote.
- [Kimbrough et al. \(2013\)](#)
- Countered by [Park et al. \(2009\)](#), but study only examines FB groups, not FB as whole
- Countered by [Haferkamp et al. \(2012\)](#), no difference in gender for task and information-orientated behaviour

3.1.5 Men use FB for dating purposes more than women

Might merge this section with “Men use FB to create new relationships more than women”

- [Muscanell and Guadagno \(2012\)](#)
- [Raacke and Bonds-Raacke \(2008\)](#)
- [Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz \(2014\)](#)
 - Men’s profile photos express masculinity or status to appear more attractive
 - Move to Self-presentation
- [McAndrew and Jeong \(2012\)](#)
 - Men express less emotion in photos to express masculinity
 - Move to Self-presentation
- [Choi and Kim \(2014\)](#)
 - Men more likely to engage in brand-related WOM discussions, possibly to increase status
- [Haferkamp et al. \(2012\)](#)
 - Men use SNS for relationship seeking more than women
 - Men are more likely to edit profile picture than women

3.2 Self-presentation

3.2.1 Profile pictures

- [Haferkamp et al. \(2012\)](#)
 - Women prefer to use portrait shots, emphasise facial features
 - Men prefer to use full body shots, including environment and other people
 - * Linked to risk taking, refer to privacy concerns

3.2.2 Use of language

- [Schwartz et al. \(2013\)](#)
- [Joiner et al. \(2014\)](#)

3.3 Privacy concerns

3.3.1 Women more concerned about privacy than men

- [Mathiyalakan, Heilman, and White \(2014\)](#)
- [Raacke and Bonds-Raacke \(2008\)](#)
- [Fogel and Nehmad \(2009\)](#)

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