
Beliefs about the Use of Instagram: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Given the rapid technological advancement, social media and communication devices continue to grow exponentially. Hence, social networking has become a major communication method in contemporary society. As a mobile application, Instagram has been widely used for personal reasons as well as business activities. Due to the lack of literature in understanding why people use Instagram in emerging markets, the present study serves as groundwork to explore the subject matter in Malaysia. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) was adapted so as to provide theoretical base to explain specific beliefs about Instagram. This provides better understanding of attitude and usage behavior towards Instagram. Qualitative method was adopted by means of personal interview in order to elicit belief factors about Instagram. Thirty-four interviews were conducted on the basis of data replicability, and all transcriptions were subsequently analyzed using content analysis. Results indicate that behavioral beliefs about Instagram are composed of five factors, and they are labeled as personal gratification, features usefulness, socializing role, product information and entertainment. Normative beliefs, in turn, are made up by six factors, and they are labeled as siblings, relatives, close friends/peers, friends in general, Facebook friends, and application reviewers. This exploratory study contributes a fundamental knowledge about Instagram and social networking communication with a theoretical stance. From managerial standpoint, it also elucidates the effect of communication manner and people from the same age-group on adopting the product.

Keywords Social networking, Instagram, beliefs, qualitative, Theory of reasoned action (TRA)

Paper type: Research Paper

1. Introduction

Social media plays a significant role at both individual and organizational levels in modern society. With the rapid growth of communication technologies (e.g. Internet and Smartphone), it has become a central tool in personal lifestyles and organizational activities (Berstrom & Backman, 2013). Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are ubiquitously known, and have been utilized for various purposes. It has been claimed that teenagers as young as twelve have at least one social networking account (Endres, 2013). Given the prevalent use of social networking with no sign of abatement, this subject matter requires continual attention and assessment from research viewpoint.

With the ongoing development of communication processes, people have gradually changed the manner they interact with each other and do things (Baisa & Thoyib, 2012). By utilizing social networking services, activities like making contacts and interacting with others have become more convenient (Bergstrom & Backman, 2013). This is because social networking focuses on initiating and building relationships, thus connecting people in an almost effortless yet effective manner (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In terms of businesses, individuals and companies who sought for market expansions in the past had to target and search for new and different markets beyond their cultural zones and familiar boundaries. While there is no surety of success, such efforts have often proved to be costly and time-consuming.

Instagram was founded in 2010. It is a mobile application for Smartphone which is freely available in the Application Store (App Store) and Google Play (Bergstrom & Backman, 2013). Being mainly a photo-sharing application, Instagram has excelled as an effective communication and marketing tool to display products with visual descriptions. Hence, it becomes a useful social networking platform instantly to individuals and companies. Moreover, the acquisition of Instagram by Facebook has potentially made the application more attractive and appealing to millions of users. Despite the usefulness of Instagram as another social networking tool, little is known about specific beliefs about the use of this particular mobile application. Whether it is just another social networking channel or a better or more innovative communication tool, especially in the context of emerging markets, remains largely unknown. Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore the belief factors about the use of Instagram at the personal level using qualitative approach. By utilizing the