

The 1st SSI (Society of Socio-Informatics) International Workshop for Young Researchers:
Adoption of Social Networking

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The Transformation of Intimacy and Privacy through Social Networking Sites

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1. Introduction

Since social media exploded onto the media landscape, numerous scholars have been quick to comment on the way in which these tools of sociability and communication have radically transformed existing notions and experiences of privacy and intimacy. boyd (2008) asserts that in the past privacy was taken for granted because it was easier not to share than to share, but with the advent of social networking sites (SNSs), the equation has been inverted. As Papacharissi and Gibson point out: “SNSs cultivate practices that prompt users to be more public with their information by default. While it is possible for users to edit these settings, the code that belies the structure of the network makes it easier to share than to hide information” (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011, p. 77). Most popular SNSs encourage sharing because they involve disclosure of personal information to foster interaction with other users (Joinson et al, 2012). Utz and Krämer (2009) argue that SNSs are effective tools of self-promotion. This is achieved through heavily edited biographical information, countless pictures, and the publicity of numerous ‘friend’ relationships, which imply popularity. Thus, Baym argues that in SNSs, self-disclosure is essential in order to foster and maintain ongoing relationships and to turn strangers into relational partners because it is a necessary part of getting to know one another and building trust (Baym, 2010). Trepte and Reinecke affirm that privacy helps to build trusting relationships online: “By creating intimate social interactions and enhancing confidentiality and trust among interaction partners, privacy is very likely to increase the willingness for openness, sincerity, and truthfulness in close relationships” (Trepte & Reinecke, 2011, p. 67). Also, Trepte and Reinecke suggest that the subjective experience of privacy sometimes may be even richer through social media than offline because people perceive that they can share their thoughts and feelings without censorship with selected publics: “People create *online spaces of social and psychological privacy* that may be an illusion; however these spaces seem to be experienced as private and the technical and architecture of the Social Web supports this notion” (Trepte & Reinecke 2011, p. 62). Thus a close relationship between privacy, disclosure and intimacy is suggested in SNSs.

According to Ito and others, “there is a growing public discourse (both hopeful and fearful) declaring that young people’s use of digital media and communication technologies defines a generational identity distinct from that of their elders” (Ito et al., 2009, p. 2). Similarly, Thompson (2008), van Manen (2010), and Jurgenson and Rey (2012) suggest that young people today are

already developing a different attitude toward their privacy, as they are aware of surveillance but they do not want to miss the opportunity to show off. Thompson (2008, p. 7) argues that youth's attitude toward their privacy: "is simultaneously vigilant and laissez-faire. They curate their online personas carefully as possible, knowing that everyone is watching". Yet, Ito et al. found in their research in the Digital Youth Project that "new media provide(s) a new venue for intimacy practices, a venue that renders these practices simultaneously more public and more private. Young people can now meet people, flirt, date, and break up outside of the earshot and eyesight of their parents and other adults while also doing these things in front of all their online friends" (Ito et al., 2009, p. 2). Sherry Turkle (2010) adds to this recognition of some of the tensions inherent in intimacy and privacy practices in social media by asserting that some teenagers are gratified by a certain public exposure because they feel it is a validation, not a violation, of their privacy. Nevertheless, these conclusions which come from the abundant research about the use of new media by teenagers are not compared with research about adult behaviour. Therefore, as Bauman pointed out: "It would be a grave mistake to suppose that the urge towards a public display of the 'inner self' and the willingness to satisfy that urge are manifestations of a unique, purely generational, age related urge/addiction of teenagers, keen as they naturally tend to be to get a foothold in the 'network'" (Bauman, 2007, p. 3). Also, the latest report of the Pew Internet Research Center (2012) about 'Privacy management on social media sites' shows that the choices that adult and teenage social media users make regarding their privacy settings are virtually identical. This suggests that there is not a privacy generation gap.

This paper attempts to engage with the general questions about intimacy, privacy and relationships that social media brings to academic and political debates. A further aim is to question if intimacy online exists at all, as some authors consider that intimacy through SNSs ceases to be intimacy and becomes something else (Sibilia, 2008; Turkle, 2010; Mateus, 2010), or it is illusory (van Manen, 2008; Taddicken & Jers, 2011). In order to do this, the concepts of privacy and intimacy need to be discussed in the context of social media. This will be addressed in the next section.

2. Privacy and Intimacy in the Age of Social Media

Bauman (2006) and Illouz (2008) suggest that a new 'emotional culture' based on an ideal of authenticity through the display of intimacy is generating new intersections of public and private life. In this changing environment, intimate lives are increasingly represented and articulated through social media, which are public by default. Thus, boyd claims that new media technology makes "social information more easily accessible and can rupture people's sense of public and private by altering the previously understood social norms" (boyd, 2008, p. 19). Also, Nissenbaum states that the activities and interactions through SNSs cannot be clearly categorized as either public or private

within this dichotomy (Nissenbaum, 2010). Other authors suggest alternatives for the problematic traditional privacy-publicity dichotomy applied to social media. Ford (2011) proposes a model of privacy as a continuum. Ford affirms that users can experience different levels of privacy in function of the control to the access to their information. On the other hand, Jurgenson & Rey point out that, as boyd (2011) observed, privacy and publicity are ‘intertwined’ and assert that: “publicity and privacy do not always come at the expense of one another but, at times, can be mutually reinforcing” (Jurgenson & Rey, 2012, p. 191). For example, when someone shares part of a story publicly through a SNS, there is always a part of the story that is not told, hence the rest of the story becomes more valuable for those who will have access to it, and the relationship with the confidant is more intimate by given them private, exclusive access.

Intimacy can be shared and disclosed in private or in public; there is no invasion of privacy if the self-disclosure is voluntary, as Gerety pointed out: “[I]nvasions of privacy take place whenever we are deprived of control over such intimacies of our bodies and minds as to offend what are ultimately shared standards of autonomy” (Gerety, 1997, p. 268). In the private realm, commonly accepted community rules pretend to preserve intimacy and, at the same time, erect barriers against intrusions by the public. Also there are certain kinds of behaviour people prefer to perform without witnesses or with selected relationships within the private sphere. It is usually the sphere where people share their intimacy, as Garzón observes: “[T]he private realm often is also the most appropriate realm for revealing some part of our intimacy (because, in general, this is less dangerous here than in the public sphere)” (Garzón, 2003, p. 27). Nevertheless, in contemporary society, intimate lives are increasingly represented and articulated in public realms. Thus, (Reynolds, 2010, p. 35) states: “[T]he very nature of intimacy in relation to private and public realms has to be reconceived and re-valorised within ethical and emancipating discourse”. Giving the things I discuss here, I need to explore the concepts of privacy and intimacy and their specificities in the context of social media, which I do below.

2-1 Privacy in Digital Context

Privacy can be seen as a right, a value, a claim or a commodity (Nissenbaum, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010). It can be a descriptive, a normative or a legal concept. Nissenbaum states that as privacy is important as a right, and it is considered to “play a crucial role in supporting other moral and political rights and values” (Nissenbaum, 2011, p. 13), it deserves legal protection and moral consideration. In contrast, boyd contests this concept, in her opinion “privacy is not an inalienable right – it is a privilege that must be protected socially and structurally in order to exist” (boyd, 2008, p. 19). Fried (1968) affirms that privacy is essential to the diversity of social relationships we maintain. Fried states that “the rights of privacy are among other basic entitlements which men

must respect in each other; and mutual respect is the minimal precondition for love and friendship” (Fried, 1968, p. 211). Thus, Rachels holds that the value of privacy is based “on the idea that there is a close connection between our ability to control who has access to us and to information about us, and our ability to create and maintain different sorts of social relationships with different people”(Rachels, 1975, p. 326). As noted by Schoeman (1984, p. 416): “The nonintrusion norms that privacy involves allow people to pursue and develop meaningful relationships”. Likewise, Gerstein (1984, p. 271) argues that: “[I]ntimacy could not exist unless people had the opportunity for privacy. Excluding outsiders and resenting their uninvited intrusions are essential parts of having intimate relationships”.

From the informational point of view, Reiman defines privacy as “the condition under which other people are deprived of access to either some information about you or some experience of you” (Reiman, 1976, p. 30; 1995, p. 30), meanwhile Fried adds that “privacy is not simply an absence of information about us in the mind of others, *rather* it is the control we have about information about ourselves” (Fried, 1968, p. 482). Similarly, Innes (1992) states that privacy functions through control, and we handle the control of our personal and intimate information through privacy. Westin agrees with Fried as he defines privacy as “the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (Westin, 1967, p. 7). Notwithstanding, Nissenbaum (2010) and McCreary (2008) argue that the concept of privacy is not only a matter of control over personal information, but privacy also includes reasonable expectation of common norms about the flow of our information, shaped by habit and convention in order to evolve solutions that allow us to live together in a civilized society. Nissenbaum states that there is some personal information we have expectation to keep private, which she labels “intimacies of personal identity”¹. In every society, argues Nissenbaum, there are different expectations relating to privacy about different matters, as privacy is a concept which is culturally shaped (Nissenbaum, 2010).

Following the work of Westin, Burgoon and fellows distinguish four dimensions of privacy: informational, social, psychological and physical. They define informational privacy as “the ability to control who gathers and disseminates information about one’s self or group and under what circumstances” (Burgoon, et al., 1989, p. 134). Burgoon describes social privacy as “an individual’s ability to withdraw from social intercourse” (Burgoon, 1982, p. 216) and considers it necessary to establish close relationships separated from the others. Psychological privacy includes both the freedom to decide what, when, and to whom to disclose personal feelings and thoughts (Burgoon, 1982), and finally physical privacy is referred to as “the freedom from surveillance and unwanted intrusions upon one’s space by the physical presence, touch, sights, sounds, or odours of others”

(Burgoon et al., 1989, p. 132). Trepte and Reinecke apply the informational, social and psychological dimensions of privacy discussed by Burgoon to social media. In terms of social privacy, SNSs permit users to control “[w]ith whom to interact and to share information by means of mechanisms such as friends lists” (Trepte & Reinecke, 2011, p. 64). Thus, Trepte and Reinecke (2011, p. 71) suggest that as a result of this fine-grained ‘customized-privacy’: “people perceive a loss of informational privacy but perceive a considerable amount of social and psychological privacy in online contexts”. They believe that social media create psychological privacy because it provides a free private space inasmuch as social media offers the possibility for publishing one’s thoughts and feelings and control the audience one wants to share this intimate information with. Different levels of self-disclosure define different types of relationships (close friends, friends, acquaintances, etc).

Nowadays people use SNSs’ profiles to locate a great amount of biographical information in order to claim attention from others, argues Aboujaude (2010). The growing sharing and disclosure of intimate information through Facebook lead Mark Zuckerberg to vindicate in 2010 that privacy is no longer a ‘social norm’(Arrington, 2010). This ideological position is based in the idea that openness and transparency are positive for society and interpersonal relations (Joinson et al., 2011). This ideology could explain why more and more people are exhibiting their intimacy as they may consider that openness is beneficial for their relationships. In this process Cohen (2012, p. 135) suggests: “Norms of transparency and exposure are developed to legitimate and reward practices of self-exposure and peer exposure. These practices are the morality plays of contemporary networked life, they operate as both spectacle and discipline”. Nevertheless, Solove (2007) claims that ‘people still want privacy’ despite privacy in the age of social media being much more complex than before. In his opinion, the main issue is how to negotiate privacy concerns and social capital needs in a social media environment in front of networked publics: “[R]arely can we completely conceal information about our lives, but that doesn’t mean that we don’t expect to limit its accessibility, ensure that it stays within a particular social circle, or exercise some degree of control over it” (Solove, 2007, p. 200). Likewise, Leino-Kilpia et al. (2001) affirm that privacy can be understood as an individual’s control over his or her circles of intimacy. Yet, boyd (boyd, 2010a) suggests that privacy concerns arise around sharing information online due to the characteristics of information online: persistent, replicable, searchable and scalable², and dynamics of use (such as invisible audiences, or context collapse) of social media. Accordingly, as noted by Palfrey and Grasser, false or misleading information and unintentionally revealed private information can be far more damaging when it appears on the Internet than if the same information were gossiped about verbally or in writing, because the magnitude of the damage caused by harmful information, “in terms of who can access it, when, how, and over what period of time, continues to increase as the use of the technology increases” (Palfrey & Grasser, 2008, p. 63). In addition, not only does self-disclosed

information put the user under threat, but also the visible communications linked to them by “friends” which may reach wider audiences. As Joinson observed, “This co-creation of users’ profile is carried out through actions such as wall posts, comments, and the tagging of photos or location” (Joinson et al., 2011, p. 35). Ellison et al. observe that the access to novel information in Facebook may help to bridge social capital, but “it may also result in negative personal or professional outcomes associated with the unanticipated disclosure of information about the self to unintended audiences” (Ellison et al., 2011, p. 30). Moreover, the relationship between privacy and self-disclosure is further complicated by the presence of different audiences such as friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances and so on, within a single space. Yet, boyd (2008, p. 6) asserts that “as a direct result of these structural changes, another form of convergence is emerging: social convergence. Social convergence occurs when disparate social contexts are collapsed into one”, and this clash might be problematic because different social context provides different kinds of norms which lead individuals to behave in a certain way (e.g., a person behaves quite differently in the pub than at work). Ellison et al. (2011) argue that people can use three strategies in order to control the audience for their disclosures on SNSs: friending behaviours, disclosures on the site, and managing audiences via privacy settings. Accepting only known ‘friends’ can be a good strategy for general SNSs as Facebook or Bebo, but in other SNSs where the interaction is mostly among strangers the gain of social capital will be almost annihilated if users only interact with people they already know offline. Also the disclosure of only superficial information about oneself is another strategy commonly used to control privacy (Attril & Jalil, 2011). Finally, despite half of social media users affirming that they have some difficulty in managing the privacy settings on their profile, as the last study of the Pew Internet Research Center (2012) shows, configuring privacy controls to manage different audience is starting to be common practice. In the United States, most of SNSs users have changed their privacy settings (public by default) in order to protect their privacy, and only 26% of men and 14% of women still keep their profiles public. There is a clear gap between genders, and men appear to be less worried about their privacy than women (Pew Internet Research Center, 2012). Nevertheless, even using all the tools available to control privacy online there are still risks that cannot be controlled such as the monitoring and tracking, or identity theft. Thus, the question here is: *why do individuals present their intimacy through social media despite the potential hazards related to privacy?* Some studies about privacy and new media identify different motivations which lead people to disclose personal information while socializing online: “faith in the networking service or trust in its members; myopic evaluation of privacy risks” (Gross & Acquisti, 2005, p. 73), impression management (Utz & Krämer, 2008; Tufekci, 2008a; Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011), affects, pleasures, exchange of ideas (Lasén and Gómez-Cruz, 2009) or gaining social capital from the interaction with other users due to the affordances of the social service (Ellison et al, 2011). Also, Tufekci found in his research that women are more likely to use SNSs to keep in touch with family and existing

friends, while men, although also use these sites to keep in touch with existing relationships, are more often attempting to meet new people (Tufekci, 2008b). According to Tufekci, that is the reason why men protect their privacy less in order to have the opportunity to meet more people. Recent studies (Krasnova, 2010; Krämer & Haferkamp, 2011) have found that the higher the level of privacy concerns the less the disclosure on SNSs and, hence, the less social capital gained.

In order to ensure liberty of choice in the selection of the people to be intimate with, some kind of control is necessary. As Garety states: “we should be able to share our intimacy with others only as we choose. It is the value of sharing such knowledge that is at stake in the right to privacy” (Gerety, 1997, p. 268). Privacy, as stated by Schoeman (1984) includes the norms which protect personal and intimate information and it is also the gated space where people can develop meaningful relationships away from the watch of the outsiders, and grants the control over information and space which enables us to maintain degrees of intimacy (Gerstein, 1984). In the next section I will explore more deeply the concept of intimacy and the characteristics of intimacy practices on social media. Also I will question if intimacy online really exists in social media as many authors consider that intimacy in public ceases to be intimacy and becomes something else (Sibilia, 2008; Turkle, 2010).

2-2 Redefining Intimacy in the Age of Social Media

The popular meaning of intimacy, as Jamieson points out, is often a kind of ‘closeness, of knowing, of being attached to another person’. Self-help books common recommendations of “talking and listening, sharing your thoughts, showing your feelings” (Jamieson, 1998: 1), are what Jamieson labels ‘disclosing intimacy’. Some scholars define intimacy related to the act of sharing (Rachels, 1975; Fried, 1968; Plummer, 2003). Thus intimacy is understood in its informational dimension as “the sharing of information about one’s actions, beliefs, or emotions which one does not share with all, and which one has the right not to share with anyone” (Fried, 1984, p. 211). Nonetheless, other authors (Reiman, 1976; Innes, 1996) do not consider enough the act of sharing personal information in order to define the concept of intimacy, but it is the context of love, liking, and caring which makes sharing of inner information significant: “The revealing of personal information then is not what constitutes or powers the intimacy. Rather it depends and fills out, invites and nurtures, the caring that powers the intimacy” (Reiman, 1976, p. 305). Thus, meaningful relationships (based on love or friendship, for instance), the intimate relationships we value for its own sake, are the realm where intimacy flourishes. Also Fried (1984), Reiman (1976) and Innes (1996) find the value and substance of intimacy in its exclusiveness, as being a scarce, restricted commodity. As Reiman states the value of intimacy lies “not merely in what I have but essentially in what others do not have. The reality of my intimacy with you is constituted not simply by the

equality and intensity of what we share, but by its unavailability to others _in other words, by its scarcity” (Reiman, 1976, p. 305). Jamieson agrees with Reiman, Iness and Plummer in the need for some kind of liking or love in order to call a relationship ‘intimate’, but she does not believe that all intimate relationships involve caring and sharing. Thus, “[I]ntimacy involves close association, privileged knowledge, deep knowing and understanding and some form of love, but it need not include practical caring and sharing” (Jamieson, 1998, p. 13). She identifies four different kinds of relationships where intimacy can flourish: couple, parental, friendship and sexual.

On the other hand, Garzón states that intimacy is the inner realm that the individual doesn’t share with anyone, “the sphere of intimacy is the realm of our thoughts, our decision-making, of doubts that sometimes cannot even be clearly formulated, of what we repress, of what has not yet been expressed” (Garzón, 2003, p. 20). Thus, taking in account Garzón’s concept of intimacy, when intimacy is expressed “it ceases to be intimate and is instead transferred to the private, and sometimes even to the public, sphere” (Garzón, 2003, p. 26). Therefore, how can we define intimacy? Is intimacy a practice or a realm? If we take into account all these concepts of intimacy and put them altogether we could arrive to a skeleton definition of intimacy as *the inner thoughts and feelings, which one only share within meaningful relationships (couple, parental, friendship or sexual) which are based in love, liking or caring. Intimacy practices, on the other hand, are the acts of sharing our inner thoughts and feelings with our significant others.*

Moreover, intimacy is a concept which seems to be valued more and more in contemporary society, as Chambers explains: “The economic, cultural and political destabilisation of traditional community values coincide with the ascendance of intimacy, privacy and the project of the self (Chambers, 2006, p. 14)”. Foessel (2010) states that intimacy was previously understood as a bastion and reserve against the claims and demands of public life, but nowadays intimacy is an important aspect of defining who we are and therefore it is often publicly exhibited as an ingredient of social identity. He claims that the ‘psychological individual’ has given way to the ‘exposed individual’. Similarly, Mateus distinguish between modern intimacy, which was a physical intimacy, and contemporary intimacy, which is an emotional intimacy, focused in its “relational dimension and the establishment of intersubjective involvements” (Mateus, 2010, p. 62). Following this discussion, van Manen compares online intimacy and offline intimacy related to space, the former being distant and the later being physical. Thus, distant intimacy appears like an oxymoron:

“Does one not need to be close to experience nearness? It depends on how one understands nearness. Digital intimacy may offer the sensibility of one-to-one closeness, but the one-to-one may be “real” or illusory. I am sitting at my computer chatting on Facebook and

feeling that I am here with you. Within this binary sphere of intimacy between myself and the screen, you are addressing me, only you and only me (even though many others may be reading your writing and feel the intimacy I feel).” (van Manen, 2010, p. 1029).

Therefore two main questions arise: *Can people really experience intimacy when interacting online?* And if the answer is yes: *Is online intimacy different from offline intimacy?* Some authors suggest that intimacy online is different than intimacy offline. Turkle affirms that digital interaction redefines intimacy and reduces it to easy connections: “When technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy” (Turkle, 2010, p. 26). Turkle states that constant digital connection makes it easier to communicate through social media than face-to-face, and it may happen that we reduce some of our existing relationships to simple connections through social media, barely communicating with them offline. On the other hand, people that we meet online or whom we usually interact through social media may become intimate due to the easy accessibility we have to them thanks to the affordances of digital communication. Other scholars believe that whenever intimacy is made public (Sibilia, 2008; Mateus, 2010) it ceases being intimacy as it loses its status when it is advertised. Similarly, Turkle (2010) pointed out that “traditionally the development of intimacy required privacy. Intimacy without privacy reinvents what intimacy means” (Turkle, 2010, p. 172). Sibilia and Mateus apply the Lacanian concept of *Extimacy* (the public exhibition of intimacy) to the social web, as SNSs are public by default, and many intimate interactions can be watched by the other contacts. Nevertheless, Mateus believes that individuals only make public a small part of their inner thoughts and feelings: “Only what is essential to enrich the individual’s personality is publicly displayed. Intimacy seems to be composed of more parts than those related to appearance. Individuals’ emotions and thoughts, even if exposed, are deeper than those taking part in extimacy” (Mateus, 2010, p. 69). On the other hand, Taddicken and Jers (2011) argue that intimacy decreases by relocating part of the intimate conversation into social media. They suggest that: “although the Social Web allows situations where intimacy with friends or family members can be established through limited access, member registration, etc., the feeling of being alone with other people in the Social Web is often illusive” (Taddicken & Jers, 2011, p. 152). Also, van Manen points out that digital intimacy can be illusory as a result of performance in social media interaction: “I felt close to you but did not realize that it was not you. Or, I may realize that you were not really yourself when you seemed to be showing off and ‘posturing’ to your readers online through your primed postings and pictures” (van Manen, 2010, p. 1028). Similarly, Ito et al. affirm that SNSs profiles are “key spaces for intimacy performance, providing a variety of ways to signal the intensity of relationships both through textual and visual representation” (Ito et al., 2010, p. 120). Performing, as observed by Baym, can lead to the recognition that behind the text in the SNS there is a real person: “our expression of emotions and

immediacy show others that we are real, available, and that we like them, as does our willingness to entertain them” (Baym, 2010, p. 62). Also, Cohen (2012) argues that in the actual ‘culture of performance’ the control of the presentation of the self in different ways through some SNSs is used to foster different kind of relationships. Yet this is not a new idea, Goffman (1967) developed the concept of ‘drama’, which emphasizes the fact that all people interpret roles in the ‘drama’ of everyday life. For Goffman, interpersonal lives are marked by performance, and life unfolds as a ‘drama’. Individuals try to manage the ways that others perceive them, and try to present themselves in a positive way. Hence, SNSs are the new stages where the ‘drama’ can be also performed.

The extensive disclosure of intimacy through social media is a recent phenomenon that has claimed the attention of many scholars. Joinson et al (2011) argue that people manage their interpersonal boundaries through the amount and depth of information they disclose to others: “by controlling disclosure, individuals manage the degree of intimacy in a relationship” (Joinson et al, 2011, p. 36). Ellison et al. point out that self-disclosure is also necessary in order to gain the benefits from the SNS: “After all, members of one’s social network cannot suggest a new job possibility if they do not know s/he is looking, nor can they offer social support if they do not know it is needed” (Ellison et al, 2011, p. 20). Another important reason why people disclose personal information online is to make new friends or find a partner, but this practice is still heavily stigmatized. boyd (2010b) found in her research about the use of MySpace that there is a stigma around people who meet new people online, as they are considered not to be able to make friends offline, apart from the general belief that meeting strangers online is dangerous. Although short-term online friendships or romances have the potential to develop into a long-term relationships (Chambers, 2006; boyd, 2010b), these kind of personal interactions can be seen as an example of the contemporary trend towards ephemeral modes of personal association. Thus, the traditional belief that the development of intimacy requires privacy (Gerstein, 1984; Turkle, 2010) is questioned by the new intimacy practices online.

Sibilia (2008) claims that social media are widely used in order to perform intimacy in public. In this process, Sibilia argues that intimacy ceases to be, as it changes to extimacy. The extreme case of *extimacy* is when people are delighted, even eager, in showing their intimacy in public: clear examples on television are talk shows or reality shows such as Big Brother. In social media this phenomenon has different versions: SNSs being actualized at any time, hyperactive bloggers, live webcams, and so on. This *new media exhibitionism* (Allen-Castellito, 1999) is seen by some authors as empowering. Koskela introduces the concept of *empowering exhibitionism* to describe the practice of revealing one’s personal life. Thus, visibility becomes a tool of power by the user that can be managed to rebel against anonymity. Koskela (2004, p. 210) claims that: “exhibitionism is

liberating, because it represents a refusal to be humble”. Also, Baym states that disclosing an honest self online can be empowering and liberating: “Practicing skills such as assertiveness can help people to work through issues involving control and mastery, gain competence, and find a comfort which they can then transfer to their embodied encounters” (Baym, 2010, p. 116). On the other hand, there are also risks in the exhibition of intimacy online. Anita Rubin (2011), who examines the concept of emotional rationality through social media, identifies the dangers and potentialities of the disclosure of intimacy in public through the use of social media. Thus, Rubin (2011) suggests that the exhibition of intimacy in public through social media may have negative implications (emotional numbing, commercialization of emotions, social indifference) and positive implications (Neo-solidarity, new social responsibility, sense of community), which differ from the implication of intimacy practices offline.

3. Conclusion

Defining what is private and intimate is a subjective matter, and it is even more complicated when the interaction is through social media due to their affordances. Privacy is increasingly becoming a socio-technical matter, nevertheless it is not reduced to a selection of a serie of parameters, but it is much more sophisticated. Privacy has traditionally been valued because it protects intimacy insofar as it grants the control over information flow and space which enables us to maintain different degrees of intimacy. Nevertheless, nowadays there is a growing phenomenon of intimacy performed in public. More and more people are exposing their intimate lives through SNSs that are public by default. This practice, which can be both empowering and risky, challenges the traditional concept that the development of intimacy requires privacy. Social media seems to be the new tool for socializing in spite of the risks of exposure. The increasing necessity of permanent hyperconnection with our peers overcomes concerns about privacy. Therefore the main issue is how to negotiate privacy concerns and social capital needs in a social media environment in front of networked publics. Even though different strategies can be used to manage privacy on SNSs to limit self-disclosure to specific audience, intimate information can be leaked to broader audience when interacting through SNSs. For this reason, in recent years, academics have conducted a lot of research about privacy on social media, nevertheless not enough about intimacy. Therefore, more research is necessary in order to map intimacy practices facilitated by SNSs and (re)define intimacy in the context of social media in contemporary society.

Notes

¹ Intimacies of personal identity may include: “close relationships, sexual orientation, alcohol intake, dietary habits, ethnic origin, political beliefs, features of the body and bodily functions, the definitions of *self*, and religious and spiritual beliefs and practices (Nissenbaum, 2010: 123).

² Persistent (information online lasts forever); replicable (information online can be copied and posted somewhere else); searchable (information online can be easily searched through a Web search engine such as Google or Yahoo!); and scalable (information online can reach wider audience if it is posted in a popular site) (boyd, 2010a).

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Visual Representations and Hypertextual Selves: Analyzing Moroccan-Dutch Identity Performativity on Online Social Networking Sites

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1. Introduction

Although various online social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Hi5 share technological configurations, the ways particular users engage with these spaces results in distinct expressive cultures. In their definition of social-networking sites, danah boyd and Nicole Ellison recognize that the “key technological features are fairly consistent”, adding that “the cultures that emerge around SNSs are varied” (2008, p. 210). However, scholars are only just beginning to consider the context-specific cultural dynamics of these platforms. For example Grasmuck et al. argue there are “still relatively few culturally specific online social network studies” (Grasmuck, Martin and Zhao, 2009, p. 161) while Andra Siibak argues that little research is done on “language-and-national-identity-specific” social networking practices (2009, np.). Therefore, to understand better the contextual dynamics of situated user practices there is a need to carry out critical readings of SNS practices.

Addressing the gap in the literature, this paper presents two complimentary approaches to analyze social-networking site user cultures. On social-networking sites, users are expected to compose digital personas by crafting a profile page. Users can for instance articulate their digital identities by publishing texts, images, hyperlinks, videos and music. Earlier empirical studies mostly focused on the textual components of SNS self-profiling (Siibak, 2009), in my attempt to diversify the scholarship profile photos and hyperlinking practices are considered. Visual representations and hyperlinks are user-generated digital artifacts that can unlock sets of associations and layers of meaning.

The focus is on the use of online social networking sites among Moroccan-Dutch youth, drawing from innovative empirical data gathered in the Utrecht University *Wired Up. Digital media as innovative socialization practices for migrant youth* research project. Moroccan-Dutch people are the second-largest minority group in the Netherlands, following those of Turkish-Dutch background. In particular, the argument builds upon large-scale survey data, qualitative in-depth interviews with and a virtual ethnography.

The argument is structured as follows. In section 2 the context of the Netherlands and the Moroccan-Dutch ethnic minority group is given. In section 3 methodological considerations are given. Next, in section 4, I introduce the ways in which Moroccan-Dutch youth use online social networking sites. The empirical part of this article consists of two case studies presented in section 5

and 6. Section 5 assesses how Moroccan-Dutch youth imbue social-networking site profile photos with gender and sexuality among. Section 6 develops further the concept of hypertextual selves, theorizing hyperlinks to acknowledge processes of networked belonging and the performance of gendered, ethnic, religious, and youth cultural fandom identities.

2. Moroccan-Dutch People in the Netherlands

Consisting of 355.883 people, those of Moroccan-Dutch descent make up some 2.1 percent of the total Dutch population of 16.6 million (CBS, 2011). Of this group, 47 percent migrated to the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards as guest workers, while the other 53 per cent were born in the Netherlands, after their parents had migrated (CBS, 2011). The majority of guest workers who arrived in the Netherlands originate from the northern Morocco Rif area, where people mostly identify as Berber in contrast with French and Arab-speakers in Morocco's urban areas. Moroccan-Dutch youths receive a lot of attention in media reporting, governmental policy-making and scholarly research. They are systematically stigmatized and made hyper visible by right-wing journalists and politicians, who frame them as anti-citizens that pose a threat to Dutch society (Leurs, Midden & Ponzanesi, 2012). Prior academic research has predominantly focused on particular behavior such as juvenile delinquency, radicalization, mental health problems and early school leaving. Bringing these four themes together, Jurgens speaks of "the Moroccan drama" (2007). These issues are undeniably important and significant, but these foci single out a narrow slice of their experiences. Things are going well for the majority of Moroccan- Dutch youths, but their realities remain largely invisible in contemporary debates. This study aims to provide greater in sight in everyday realities and identity construction practices of Moroccan-Dutch youths.

Not only is the Dutch Internet relatively understudied, a focus on Moroccan-Dutch youths is especially urgent because prior researchers have recognized this ethnic minority group includes particularly avid digital media users but they have not yet laid bare the specifics of their preferences and user behavior (Brouwer, 2006). Therefore, by innovatively building on new media, gender and postcolonial theory and a mixed-method approach, I carry out an analysis of a young ethnic-minority population whose contribution to digital culture is not well understood.

3. Methodological Considerations

The fieldwork was conducted in the context of Wired Up, a collaborative, international research project operating at the interface of the humanities and social sciences, aimed at understanding the multifarious implications of digital media use among migrant youths. By combining large-scale questionnaires with semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews and virtual ethnographies, I join differently located and situated, but complimentary perspectives. In this section, I describe the questionnaire, in-depth interviews and virtual ethnography, before elaborating

on the participatory research technique of asking respondents to draw an Internet map.

3-1. Questionnaire

A large-scale survey was developed and a total of 1408 young people contacted through seven secondary schools in five Dutch cities, completed the questionnaire in classrooms or computer labs. This article principally considers data from 344 Moroccan-Dutch students – 181 girls and 163 boys – who participated in the questionnaire. On average they are 14.5 years ($SD=1.7$) old, and when prompted 98.5% describe themselves as Muslim. Three-quarters (76.2%) of these young people speak Dutch at home with their parents. Two thirds speak Dutch in combination with a Berber language (66.9%) and half combines Dutch with Moroccan- Arabic (52.6%). Survey findings will be used throughout this article to provide a general impression of digital media use frequencies, attachments to applications and online self-presentation practices.

3-2. In-depth Interviews

From all survey participants, a selected group of 30 Moroccan-Dutch young people aged 12-16 was invited to join the second phase of the study which consisted of in-depth interviews. In order to include 17 and 18-year olds and to diversify the group of informants further, 13 Moroccan-Dutch youths were contacted using snowballing methods in three cities. In sum, in-depth interviews were carried out with a group of 43 Moroccan-Dutch individuals, 21 girls and 22 boys between 12 and 18 years old, their average age was 15 years. Except for four informants who migrated themselves, the majority of the interviewees was born in the Netherlands from parents who had migrated to the Netherlands as guest-workers.

3-3. Virtual Ethnography

In the third and final phase, digital media texts, images and videos circulating in online forums, instant messaging, social networking sites and *YouTube* were gathered through virtual ethnography, a form of online participant-observation (Hine, 2008). Ethnographical data presented in this article builds on 14-year old Ayoub, 13-year old Anas, 13-year-old Midia, 13-year-old Mohammed, 15-year old Oussema and 15-year-old Yethi who provided me access to the content published on their personal profile pages.

3-4. Participatory Research Technique: Internet Maps

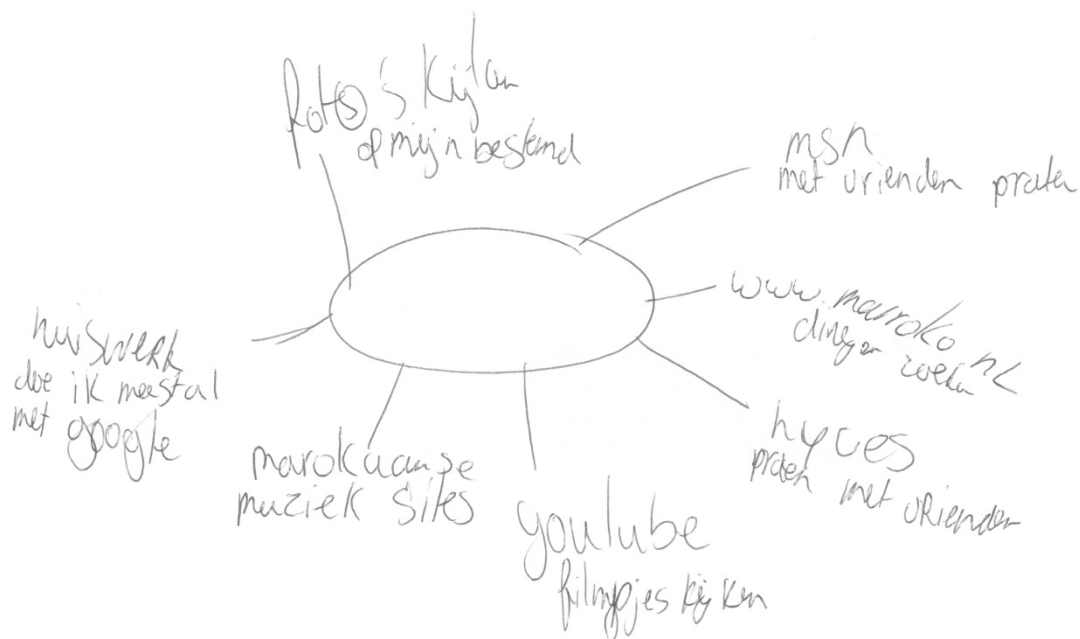
By including participatory research techniques in my interview set-up, I promoted informants to (at least partly) study with me their digital experiences and to become active agents over their own representations in the analysis. Besides using techniques such as inviting informants to come up with their own pseudonym and their own self-description at the beginning of the face-to-face interview, I

asked informants to research with me their practices by letting them map out the digital spaces they participate in. Richard Warshak contends “most procedures for soliciting children’s preferences do not reliably elicit information on their best interests and do not give children a meaningful voice in decision making” (2003, p. 373). At the beginning of the interviews informants were invited to draw a map of how they imagine the Internet with its various digital spaces as a way to further structure the conversation. The task is an example of “image based concept mapping”, a participatory research technique which has been recognized as a successful way to capture the conceptions of networked information and communication technologies (Somekh and Mavers, 2003, p. 414).

As an example, I showed informants a map of the Internet applications that I use regularly. I had prepared this map before the interview, writing my name in the middle of a white piece of paper. From my name outwards I drew lines to different digital spaces. I would share the fact that one of my hobbies is playing basketball. For this reason, I said, I regularly looked up the latest fixtures on basketball related weblogs and message boards, and I described how I enjoyed looking up videos with highlights of basketball matches on *YouTube*. I discussed the ways that I connected with my family and friends on the social networking sites *Facebook* and *Hyves*. Also, I included download websites such as *ThePirateBay.org* to discuss my preferences to download basketball videos. The description of this task doubled as a bonding exercise, letting the informant into my world as well. This warming-up phase was aimed at developing a rapport. Drawing the Internet map was an aid to recall and structure digital practices

I positioned myself through a formal introduction and revealed more about myself by showing my personal Internet map. The task proved to be a good icebreaker. As they were making a cartography informants were researching digital practices with me. Interviewees were asked to map out their practices and add a short description of a few keywords. Figure 1 displays the Internet map of 13-year-old Soesie. She for instance includes from the top left “*Watching pictures in my files*”, “*MSN talking to friends*”, “*www.Marokko.nl to look up things*”, “*Hyves to talk to friends*”, “*YouTube to watch videos*”, “*Moroccan music websites*” and “*for homework I usually use Google*”.

The Internet map was thus useful for structuring the interview and eliciting personal narratives of passages, belonging and identification across digital space, and at the same time, the map enabled the informant to seize control over the directions the conversation would take. The mapping exercise also allowed room to consider directions the survey findings had not brought forward or that I had not anticipated before otherwise. Thus, informants assisted me in defining the boundaries of my research, which is of increasing importance when considering the multiplicity of all existing Internet applications (Hine, 2008). During the mapping exercise, informants continued managing the impression they wanted to make on the researchers. While drawing the map, 15-year-old Oussema for instance said, “*Oh I have forgot one thing*”, hesitating to add another practice on his map he added, “*this may sound as if I am a nerd*”.



[Figure 1: Example Internet Map 13-year-old Soesie].

After informants finished drawing the Internet maps, one by one, all the different digital spaces informants listed were separately discussed in all interviews. The Internet mapping exercise was chosen after learning in the piloting phase that young informants found it difficult to think about issues that range across different applications; rather, they talked about how they made use of specific applications rather than the Internet in general. Informants were for instance prompted to describe their frequency of use and to explain the features and usages of different applications. In my follow-up questions, I asked to what extent the individual platforms each facilitated their presentation of self in terms of youth culture, gender, ethnicity and religion. Informants were asked about the commercial messages and advertisements they encounter in these spaces. Most importantly, the values, meanings and relevance attributed to each application were discussed, by considering which practices they found empowering, restricting, inspirational, discriminatory and troubling.

4. Moroccan-Dutch Youth Using Online Social Networking Sites

In this section I acquaint the reader with Moroccan-Dutch youths' use of social networking sites by detailing the use of *Hyves* and *Facebook* in the words of the informants. I discuss reasons for joining these platforms, dynamics of setting up a profile page and how personal profile pages can be used to signal affiliations.

4-1. Introducing Facebook and Hyves

At the time of writing *Facebook* was beginning to outgrow *Hyves*, however *Hyves* was found to be especially popular among younger users in contrast with adults. *Hyves* was setup in October 2004, “named after beehives. The users are bees and the social network is the hive”. The space is developed to be nationally oriented and most content is posted in Dutch (Bannier, 2011, p. 587). During the period of fieldwork, its founders sold the site to owners of the Dutch conservative daily newspaper *De Telegraaf*. Oussema noted he stopped using the site, similar to a lot of other Dutch citizens, fearing the new owners would commercially exploit the site more extensively “*I have deleted my account yesterday. I have heard that they will be sending a lot of advertisements*”. Originally targeted towards students, *Facebook* became publicly accessible in September 2006, and a Dutch-language version was released in May 2008.

<i>Attachment to SNS use</i>	<i>Completely not</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Very much</i>	<i>Total</i>
Girls	38.7 %	29.3 %	32.0 %	100 %
Boys	42.3 %	30.1 %	27.6 %	100 %

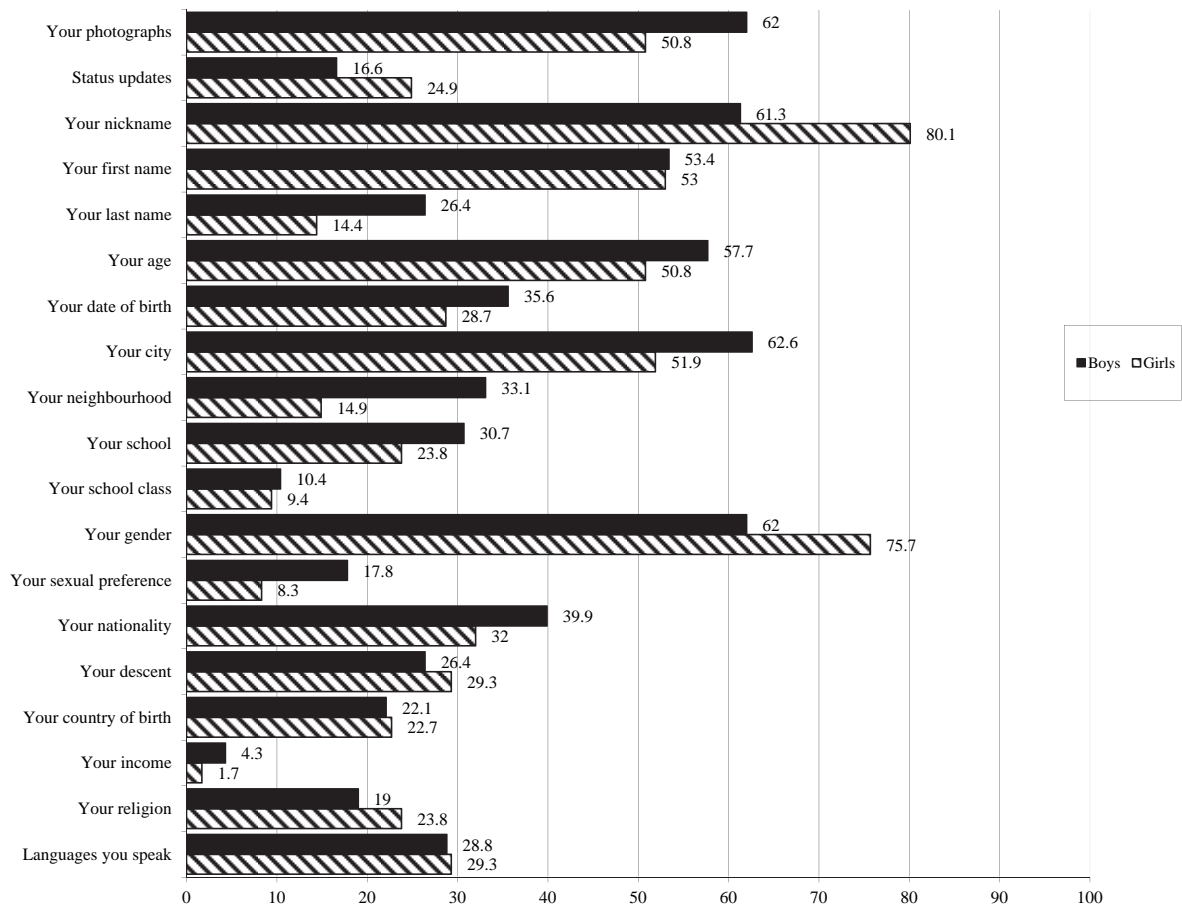
[Table 1: Would Moroccan-Dutch Youths Miss Social Networking Sites If They Could Not Use Them Anymore? (n= 344).]

Social networking sites are digital spaces informants visit on a daily basis. Ilana, 16-year-old, says a profile page allows “*sharing your own photo’s and videos, what you do in your daily life*”. 17-year old Ferran makes “*daily use of it, when I’m on the computer, I sign in to Hyves*” and he adds his use is “*not an addiction but more of a habit*”. 16-year-old Nevra adds its “*standard*” she logs in automatically. By asking whether respondents would miss the digital space of SNSs if they were not able to frequent them anymore, it was found that roughly two-thirds of Moroccan-Dutch young people reported they feel attached to the communication platform (see table 1). Online social networking seems interwoven into the fabrics of everyday life, as is also illustrated with the verbs *facebooking* and *hyving* that have become common parlance among the interviewees.

In general, the younger interviewees aged between 12 and 15 years old note to primarily use *Hyves*, while informants aged 16 years old and upwards seem to prefer *Facebook*. Both aesthetic and functional differences are experienced between the two sites. *Hyves* offer more opportunities for customization in comparison with *Facebook*. Fifteen-year-old Hatim feels “*Hyves, you can do more things with it, such as changing your background. With Facebook, it’s only white and blue; it’s not so nice. You cannot change the background*”. Yethi, 15-year-old states “*Hyves is more colorful, Facebook is a bit dull*”. Digitizing the passages from childhood to adulthood, informants noted to move from *Hyves* to *Facebook*, as older adolescents note to prefer the clean, orderly and more professional look of *Facebook*. Furthermore, unlike *Hyves* which is mostly frequented by Dutch speaking users, *Facebook* enables users to establish transnational contacts with those living in the

diaspora outside of the Netherlands, as Wafaa, 15-year-old, says: “not the whole world has Hyves. There you don’t have your family living in Belgium, Morocco and so on. It’s more the Netherlands”. In *Hyves* a nationally bounded community is established , in contrast with the global reach of *Facebook*. Sixteen-year-old Ilana describes this dynamic as follows:“*Hyves is mostly about what happens in the Netherlands. And on Facebook you have people from all over the world*”.

4-2. Self-profiling Attributes



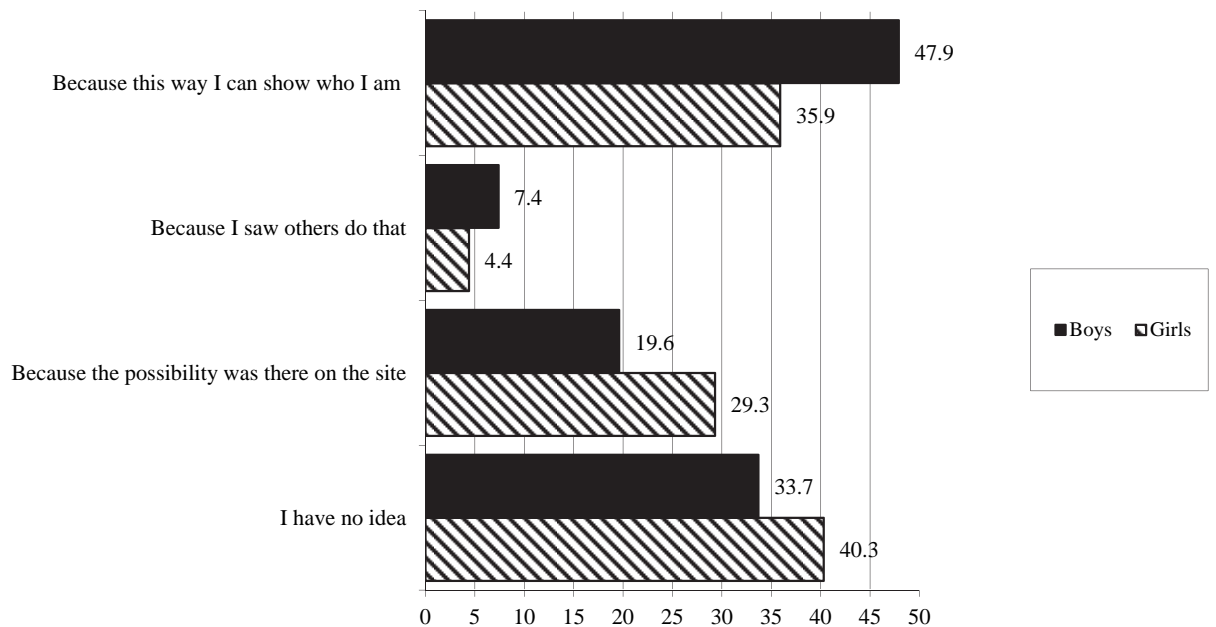
[Figure 2: Moroccan-Dutch Youths Self-reporting SNS Profiling Attributes (graph shows percentages, n = 344).]

In the Wired Up survey, respondents were asked what it is they like to show off themselves on their personal profile page. Nicknames, gender and photos can be seen as three of the most important self-profiling attributes Moroccan-Dutch youths use, as these attributes were mentioned most often. More than two-thirds of respondents say to include these on their profile pages. Especially girls frequently noted to add their gender and nicknames while boys reported to show location markers

such as their city, neighborhood and school. Other personal backgrounds that were frequently mentioned are publishing one’s age, first name, nationality, birthday, languages one speaks, and one’s descent (figure 2). In the following paragraph I address motivations for self-profiling.

4-3. Motivations

In the interviews, access to sociability was mentioned as an important reason to join social networking sites. Informants mentioned feeling the urge to follow in the footsteps of their peers and set up a profile of their own. Loubna, 14-year-old, for instance joined *Facebook* because she noticed her sisters having fun using it “*my sisters always went on Facebook, so I thought ‘yes I will also setup a Facebook’” account*”. Similarly, thinking aloud about why he set up a profile on *Hyves*, 15-year-old Ryan said, “*I think I have made it because many children had one. And I thought ‘why don’t I make one’, and then I made one*”.



[Figure 3: Moroccan-Dutch Youths Self-reporting Reasons for Profiling (multiple answers possible, graph shows percentages, n = 344).]

In the survey, with the question “why do you include things like music and photographs on your website” respondents were also invited to reflect on the reasons why they include certain attributes on their profile pages (see figure 3). More than girls, Moroccan-Dutch boys reported that profiling options such as photographs allow them to show who they are. Also they did so more often because of seeing others doing so. Girls more often responded they had no idea why they include certain things on their personal page. They also more frequently noted including elements on their profile pages after seeing the site offered the chance to do so. In sum, this section showed there is

variety of ways Moroccan-Dutch youths can articulate their individuality using online social networking sites. Different profiling opportunities give the user the opportunity to make visual statements about their ethnic, religious, gendered and youth cultural situatedness to an extended group of connected friends.

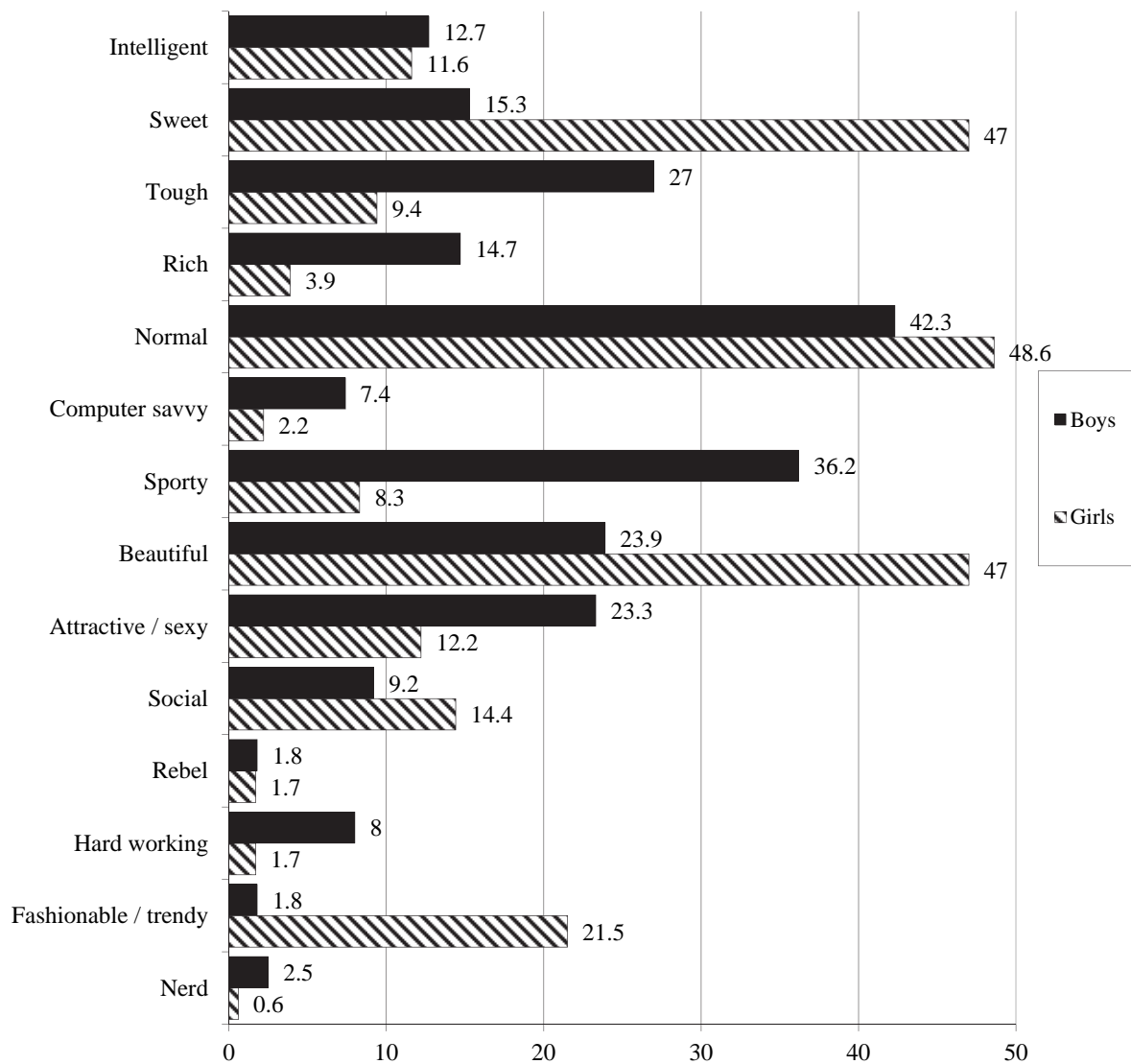
In the following two sections, I consider two different perspectives to consider further the wider socio-informatics implications of social-networking sites use. I first focus on the gendered gaze in/of profile pictures, before considering hypertextual networking and intercultural encounters.

5. Visual Representations and the Gendered Gaze

Analyzing the Wired Up survey findings, I argued in section 4.1 that gender and visual representation are considered key to self-profiling on social networking sites. Gender and photographs were singled out as two of the most popular attributes used among the respondents to decorate their personal profiles pages. In this section I continue my exploration of how the two are related. *“You’ll see more and get a chance to know more about a person”*. This statement by 12-year-old Soufian is exemplary of the seeing-is-knowing motive many informants shared. On a social networking site, the profile picture of a user “stands in” for his/her body (Strano, 2008, np). Besides technological constraints that inscribe themselves upon user self-profiling, the way profile photographs are used by users to stand in for themselves on social networking sites is also partly influenced by gendered peer norms and expectations. Guided by these insights I focus in this section on gender as the primary analytical category in my analysis of how informants (perceive the) use of profile images

5-1. Display Picture Ideals

A question was included in the Wired Up survey that asked respondents how they would show themselves in their profile pictures in order to be liked by their friends. With the question we aimed to learn more about the norms of online photographic self-depictions among young people. In designing the survey, we acknowledged that display pictures do not carry singular meanings. Therefore, respondents were invited to choose a maximum of three self-presentation labels. This opportunity was used, as the percentages add up to well over 100% for both girls and boys. Answers given to the question allow for reflecting on impression-management, expectations of appropriate self-presentations and ideal beauty-standards among Moroccan-Dutch youths.



[Figure 4: Moroccan-Dutch Youths Self-reporting Their Visual Self-presentation Ideals (graph shows percentages, n = 344).]

Most strikingly, survey findings show that nearly half of the Moroccan-Dutch girls and boys in the survey sample report they would like to present themselves as “normal” (figure 4). In addition to the label “normal”, boys and girls chose specific labels to describe their aspired self-presentation. Commonly chosen labels indicate that participating girls specifically desire to look “beautiful”, “sweet” or “fashionable/trendy” and “social” and to a lesser extent “attractive/sexy”, “intelligent” and “tough”. Boys want to come across as “sporty”, “though”, “beautiful”, “attractive/sexy”, and to a lesser extent “sweet”, “rich”, “intelligent”, “hard working” and “computer savvy” (see Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2012, pp. 446-447).

By asking respondents how they would like to show themselves in order to be liked by their

friends, the survey findings reveal how Moroccan-Dutch youths would ideally represent themselves. Striving to meet expectations of what is accepted as normal and standard in profile-page culture seems an important ideal. Meeting the normal standard is combined with dichotomous gender ideals. Girls' ideals are being beautiful and sweet, while boys aim for a sporty image and toughness. Being expected to showcase certain attributes, these ideals reveal self-regulatory values young people negotiate with (Siibak, 2009). Each of these labels covers a distinct configuration of femininity and masculinity. Andra Siibak in Estonia (2009) and Michele Strano in the U.S. (2008) have found similar self-presentation labels, for instance girls aim to display ideals of female beauty on their online profile pages. These findings suggest shared (youth cultural) norms of gender that go beyond ethnic groups.

During the interviews, informants described a stereotypically gendered practice of profile photo selection. Oussema described that most boys show themselves as follows: *“look at how pretty I am, look at how nice my eyes as a ray of light shines in it”* or they pose in their pictures with *“pumped up chests”* and aim to go for a *“look at how tough I am, look at how muscled I am”* impression or, while girls *“lean forward”*, show their bodily curves and *“blow a kiss to the camera”*. 14-year-old Ziham said boys *“put up tough photos, where they put up their middle-fingers and so on”*, she adds that among her friends *“girls don't do that. They just show themselves wearing tight clothes or so, with untied hair”*. According to Bibi, 16-year-old, in some photos *“girls show their boobs almost popping out of their bras”*. 14-year-old Ayoub notes *“girls put lots of make-up on”* or show pictures *“when they have just come from the shower”*. Although individual informants often nuanced their own positioning (see last section of this section on in-betweenness), the majority of the informants gave a highly stereotypically gendered description of photograph ideals.

In her visual analysis of photos posted to *Rate.ee*, the most popular social networking site in Estonia, Siibak found strikingly similar patterns. She notes that stereotypes of the “porno-chic” are the source for dichotomous gender identities. In their attempt to meet social expectations of female physical attractiveness she found that girls met the norms and emphasized sexuality by smiling (which can be interpreted as a submissive position in the power/status hierarchy), stressing their slenderness, exposing their bodies and wearing clothes to stress their perfect body shape. Additionally, the majority of women were posing from a position of inferiority, submissively looking up at the viewers with canted heads *“so that the viewer was placed in a position of superiority”*. Emphasizing manliness, the Macho man for instance posed next to a car or motorcycle (signs of hyper-masculinity) and exposes his bare athletic body for *“the female gaze”* (2007, np).

The particular ways of showing that the informants note to be encouraged in social networking sites signal hierarchical power relations. Girls wanting to come across as sweet and beautiful are more submissive portrayals than the tough and sporty image boys desire to project. Contrasting feminine and masculine self-presentational repertoires exposes forms of patriarchal subordination

that get perpetuated and magnified in the digital realm. Following Donnelly, in expressing themselves on social networking sites, users build on cultural signs of desirability stemming from a patriarchal belief system:

Collective, societal ideologies that favor youth, Western standards of beauty (thin, white, tall, able-bodied, etc), and conformity are dominated by a patriarchal system that genders traits as either “masculine” or “feminine” empowering the masculine while devaluing the feminine.

– Ashley Donnelly (2011, p. 174)

Although users themselves decide to publish certain digital self-portraits of their bodies on their profile pages, their choices are to a certain extent guided by the ideals and expectations of an imagined audience of peers. Informants frequently brought up their audiences during the interviewees, and getting reactions from peers is highly valued. For example, 16-year-old Bibi notes she is always eager to read reactions and learn about others’ opinions when she posts a photo on Facebook “*it is so interesting, because on Facebook you can react on pictures. And I’m really like ‘oh someone is reacting on my photo’. You know, I am very curious*”. Photographs are used to attract attention, 15-year-old Hajar notes that boys go on Facebook where they “*search for girls that they like*”, and they will then “*react on photos, you know, to ask the girl out on a date and so on*”. And they allow users to gain status. 14-year-old Ayoub notes you can become very popular when you post good photos. His friend uploaded a photo and asked everyone “*to give respect to the photo*”. Ayoub adds this is done because “*when you have a photo, and a lot of people have reacted on it, on that day, it will appear on ‘the story of the day’, the opening page of your Hyves friends*”.

5-2. Meeting the Gaze: Objectification and/or Representation?

The question arises whether feminine (submissive) self-portrayal and objectification must be understood purely as a lack of empowerment. Can it also be a strategic decision by users to publish feminine photographs to their profile page? Kristine Blair and Pamela Takayoshi discuss the complex dialectic by pointing out that “images of women on the Web exist along a continuum from objectification to representation” (1999, p. 7). They add that the objectification of women cannot be fully attributed to men only, as women themselves also navigate the continuum “consciously and unconsciously in their own production of electronic discourse” (ibid.). Similarly on social-networking sites, young female users who conform to and identify with vanity and beauty ideals in their profile images might feel pleasure and empowerment when receiving attention and attracting a large audience to their personal profile pages. Furthermore, historically, based on restrictive cultural and Islamic principles women and girls were rarely allowed to be photographed in Morocco. This still holds for some Arab Muslim girls, as for instance Leage and Chalmers found to

be the case in Qatar (2010, pp. 34-35). Uploading photos online these girls can take up self-expression liberties they did not have offline.

These forms of power and agency also have their obvious wide-ranging drawbacks. As Laura Buffardi and W. Keith Campbell describe, *Facebook* may encourage “narcissistic behavior”: “narcissists appear to be attractive on Facebook because they are strategically posting pictures that make them appear sexy and attractive” (2008, p. 1311). In the case of uploading self-chosen photographs to one’s profile page, a girls’ internalization of the gaze might result in seizing the opportunity to take control over how she is being observed online. This opportunity however becomes increasingly difficult as the celebrated ideals in visual culture of youth, fitness and beauty are becoming more and unrealistic and unattainable, especially in the present era of widespread digital manipulation. In a search for conformity, this entails disciplining the body with dieting, fitness, and consuming products from the beauty industry. In their attempts at gender stereotypically inscribing themselves in the desiring gazes of masculine objectification, girls’ aspirations to meet the male fantasy are impossible to completely fulfill. Again punctuating the myths of utopian digital disembodiment, when falling victim to the heterosexual male gaze and sensing digital their photographic self-depictions do not meet its ideals, girls might not feel valued as full human beings.

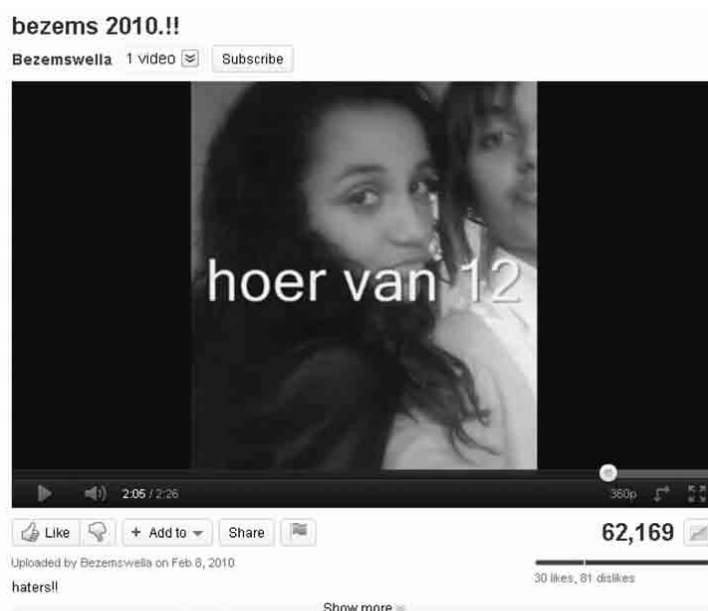
5-3. Victimization and Cautionary Measures

A statement 17-year old Ferran made can be taken to further ground the potential for agency in the context of the Moroccan-Dutch context. He thinks some Moroccan-Dutch “*girls are a bit more loose, because they do not really have contact with boys, real contact*” away from the Internet. Taking the opportunity to have more freedom and befriend boys online, Ferran adds, “*some Moroccan girls put up crazy pictures that they shouldn’t have done*”. He hints at the fact that acts of online experimentation may have very serious consequences. The discussion in section 4.4 of Naoul and Inzaf’s friend who was severely beaten up after engaging in *MSN* webcam intimacy is an exceptional, but brutal reminder of negative repercussions. As 17-year-old Sadik notes, users are not always conscious of the consequences of the ways they depict themselves in their profile images, they do not “*realize what can happen*”:

Sometimes you see the craziest things on Hyves, weird things that make you wonder, ‘okay, if your dad know about this, you would not have Hyves anymore’. Some people take nude pictures and put them on their Hyves. Thinking that is a fun thing to do until the wrong person comes across them.

Girls, but also boys, feeling urged to upload revealing profile pictures may fall victim to being “broomed” (“bezemen” in Dutch). In Dutch street language, the dismissive label “bezem” stands for

“hooker” in the case of girls and “homosexual” in the case of boys. 15-year-old Hatim explains, “people can take your image, and save it to their computer, and edit it and put it on a site. For instance people put up a video on YouTube which said ‘Hookers of the city’ which included a lot of photographs”. Figure 5 is a still taken from a “bezem” YouTube video. The maker’s nickname “Bezemswalla”, includes a reference to brooming, but also “walla”, Arabic and Berber for “I swear”. The video consists of a compilation of photographs displaced from profile pages of Moroccan-Dutch boys and girls. The photos are accompanied with abusive commentary such as “blowjob slut” and “homo”. The still displays a girl who looks upwards at the viewer from the corner of her eyes and she leans on a tough looking guy. The maker of the video clip has edited the photograph by including the statement “hooker of 12” years old.



[Figure 5: Still *Bezems 2010.!!* by Bezemswalla on YouTube (February 8, 2010).]

Even though the video was deleted from the YouTube servers shortly after its publication, the 62.000 plus people who have watched *Bezems 2010.!!* illustrate video circulation is rapid. YouTube users flagged the video as inappropriate, and 81 people clicked the dislike button, versus 30 people who clicked the like button. When trying to access the video, users are now shown the following message: “[t]his video has been removed because its content violated YouTube’s Terms of Service. Sorry about that”. Such materials however can spread across video sharing sites with great speed making it difficult to completely remove them from the Internet. Victimized young people through brooming is a new semi-anonymous form of cyberbullying, hostile behavior which re-shifts power balances. For example ex-lovers carry out these practices to digitally take revenge after relationship break-ups. Once profile photos are lifted from their original intimate, yet semi-public contexts,

feelings of empowerment in successfully attracting friends and achieving popularity thus might also disappear after being victimized and rendered helpless.

Judging from the informants' descriptions and *YouTube* search results this practice is observable among youths of a variety of backgrounds in the Netherlands but it seems to be especially prevalent among Moroccan-Dutch youths, indicating how conflicting gender and sexual morals affect girls in specific ways (which also became apparent in chapter four on instant messaging). *Hyves* co-founder Raymond Spanjar writes in his book on the history of the social networking site that virtual bullying seems to be "especially prevalent among allochthonous girls and the victim is portrayed as a slut". This is not without dangers, as he cites from a desperate e-mail by *Hyves* user Fatima he received "Raymond you have to help me. Please delete that fake profile of mine, the one on which I'm doing a striptease. My brothers will kill me once they see me" (2011, p. 133).

Similar to how Qatari Arab girls in the study by Leage and Chalmers used creative methods to safely express themselves on *Facebook* (2010, p. 41), interviewees report to take cautionary measures to monitor their privacy and reputation. For instance 14-year-old Senna shared she restricts herself in publishing personal photos, selecting only a few, and publishing them not publicly but only for her friends to see: "*I have put up only some photos, but it's not like anyone can see them, I don't like that*". She keeps a close watch at whom she befriends, and unfriends contacts whenever she thinks it is necessary to control her reputation. On most social networking sites, by default, information published to profile pages is public. Sixteen-year-old Nevra, who shared her fear of the phenomenon of brooming, shared she also became more hesitant over placing photographs on *Hyves*, and she made sure to "*make the profile invisible, only visible for my friends*". Fourteen-year-old Kenza listed fictive personal information while 15-year-old Meryam shared she chose a creatively spelled pseudonym instead of her real name when she setup her profile page on *Facebook*.

In this way, Meryam renders it more difficult for non-friends to locate her in the space. She noted to fear being easily traceable on *Facebook*, as people with bad intentions would be able to download her pictures and digitally manipulate them: nowadays people "*can take your head and paste it onto another body*", adding "*I have heard from girls in other cities that they have completely been ruined on the internet*". Subverting *Facebook's* "real name culture" policy, a number of other female interviewees chose to adopt a similar strategy of choosing pseudonyms in order to make it more difficult for their profile page and photos to be found. Joe Sullivan, *Facebook's* chief security officer, argues that *Facebook* promotes a "real name culture", arguing that "Facebook's real name culture creates accountability and deters bad behavior since people using Facebook understand that their actions create a record of their behavior" (2010, p. 2). Some informants note they adapt the space to their own preferences, saying that policy instilled forms of peer accountability are insufficient, arguing that pseudonyms, fictive information, making one's profile invisible and

consciously choosing what pictures to upload are better ways to monitor one's reputation and deter bad behavior.

5-4. In-betweenness

Lastly, I want to offer a final nuance to the ways in which profile photos are imbued with gender and sexuality by noting that their norms do remain open to subversion. Informants do underline that they do not necessarily always conform to the dominant gender stereotypical modes of visual representation I have described so far. For instance Oussema specifies that he positions himself "*in-between, always in-between*" in his profile images. He states:

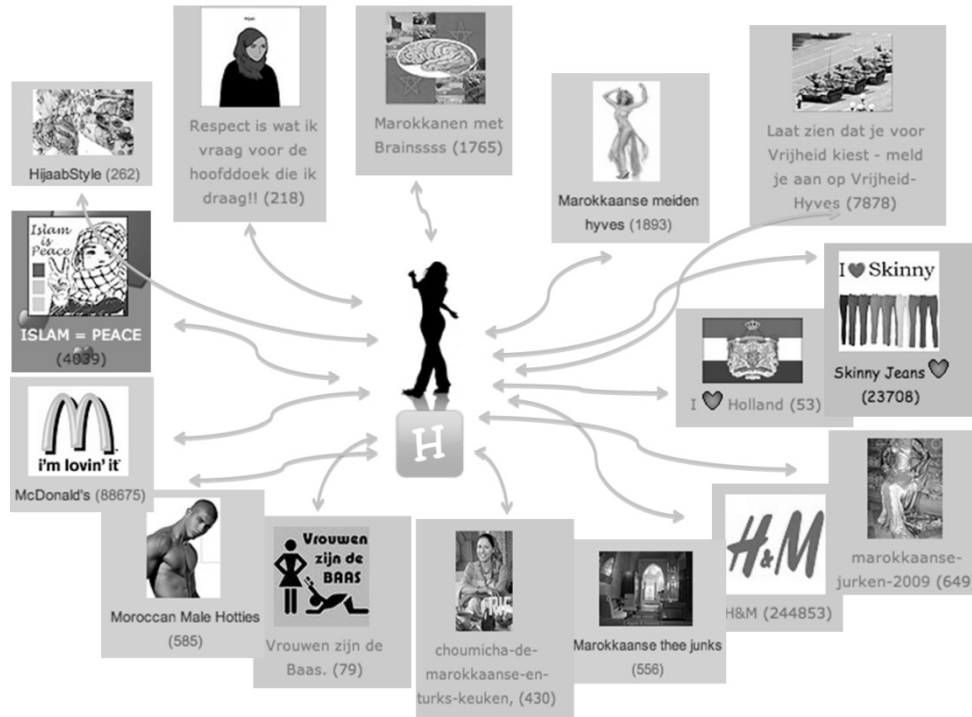
I like sports a lot, but I also like computer games a lot, so I'm a bit in-between... I'm not a chubby kid, but also not super muscled. I'm not like 'look at how tough I am', but also not like 'look at how nice my eyes are in the photo', it's more a bit in between.

In the next section I zoom in further on how social-networking sites are used to articulate in-between identities. I shift the focus, from analyzing the use of pictures to perform a version of the self, to using hyperlinks for the same purpose. Besides photographs, hyperlinks are visual statements that are part of the larger visual narrative of self users compose on their personal profile pages. By signaling affiliations, hyperlinks can be seen as another way to brand and communicate oneself to one's peer community.

6. Hypertextual Selves: Convivial Fandom and Networked Belonging

Profile images are only one example of the myriad ways SNS users constitute a graphical narrative of self on their profile page. In figure 6 the icons of the groups 13-year-old Midia hyperlinks to on her *Hyves* profile page are shown. She connects to a variety of groups ranging from feminist interests ("Women in Charge"), Dutch nationalism ("I love Holland") to food cultures relating to both migration backgrounds ("Choumicha, the Moroccan and Turkish kitchen", "Moroccan tea junky") as well as global junk food ("McDonald's"). She expresses belonging to religious interests ("Hijaab Style", "Islam = Peace"), different clothing styles such as from headscarves ("Respect is what I ask for the headscarf that I'm wearing"), Moroccan dresses ("Moroccan dresses 2009") and global fashion trends ("Skinny Jeans love" and the brand "H&M"). Additionally she joined the groups "Moroccan Male Hotties" and "Show you chose for Freedom – sign up for the Freedom-Hyves". These groups vary in member-size from 53 members who joined the group "I love Holland" to 244853 members who joined "H&M". Joining these groups, hyperlinked icons are published on Midia's profile and these different visual statements cover a wide spectrum of interests, belongings and affiliations. Taken together on a profile page, these different

hyperlinked constitute a multicultural bricolage of fandoms and a discursive space of intercultural encounter.



[Figure 6: *Hyves* Groups Midia Links to on Her *Hyves* Profile Page (April 15, 2009)].

Social networking sites allow users to traverse and add hyperlinks to their personal websites in the forms of profile pages, the publishing of preferences, and possibilities of participating in and affiliating with interest-based communities. Profile pages consist of a dynamic hypertext based on Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) coding. HTML is the protocol of documents that refer to each other, constituting the backbone of the Web; every text that you find on the Internet is connected to a web of other texts through hyperlinks. These links are in essence at equal distance from each other. As well as being a technological device, hypertext is also a metaphor to think with. Hypertext incorporates multiplicity as the examples of the groups Midia hyperlinks to display. Donna Haraway recognized that hypertext emphasizes making of connections, but it does not foreground or forecloses certain areas of the Internet. Approaching profile pages from the perspective of hypertext enables me to make an “inquiry into which connections matter, why, and for whom” (1997, pp. 128-130).

In this section, first, I recognize self-profiling (including hypertextual linking) as a fandom practice. I ground my analysis in *Wired Up* survey findings and informants’ discussions of cultural self-profiling on social networking sites. Subsequently I zoom in on intercultural encounters by detailing how Moroccan-Dutch and majority Dutch youths both report to express affiliations to food,

celebrities and music artists that pertain to their own ethnic backgrounds. However, these groups also express the desire to publish international food, celebrities and music artists' affiliations. The promising double-sidedness of cultural identification is subsequently theorized from the perspective of postcolonial theory. I turn to hypertextual performativity of self and argue informants' linking to group pages is an example of conviviality, a form of multiculturalism from below.

6-1. Self-profiling as Fandom

In expressing a variety of affiliations, Midia displays actively re-values her ethnic, religious and gendered embeddings. Writing about young people more broadly, Sonia Utz argues that users on *Hyves* actively brand themselves towards their peers (2008, pp. 247-254). Similar to how on *Facebook* users can press the "Like" button to show their appreciation of a page, video or photo uploaded on *Hyves* people perform their preferences. I want to consider these processes in this section as a form of fandom. Studies on fan cultures stress the relevance of studying how individuals as dedicated and participatory audience members select from the repertoires of popular culture. Together with Henry Jenkins, John Fiske rendered fandom into a viable object of scholarly attention. Deliberative consumption of cultural and media artifacts enable pleasure, individuality and identity construction. Fans use media products to express their own culture, by selectively "poaching" media texts and favored significations (Jenkins, 1992). Fiske wrote about fandom as an ongoing process of "capital accumulation": "[f]an cultural capital, like the official, lies in the appreciation and knowledge of texts, performers and events" (1992, p. 42). Fans are active consumers who become often, and especially in digital settings, also producers and distributors of content. Fiske recognized that fandom arises from confrontations with "dominant value systems" and it can therefore be associated "particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race" (Fiske, 1992, p. 30). In studies of digital fandom, the focus has however mostly been on "the default fanboy", which presumes a geeky, young, white, middle-class, heterosexual male (Gatson & Reid, 2012, np).

Hyperlinking is a slice of the larger domain of fandom practices on social networking sites. The dynamics of performing ethnicity as fandom practice can be illustrated by considering how the publishing of Berber belongings. 16-year-old Bibi for instance notes she joined the "Imazighen Hyves group" to include a Berber flag icon on her profile page "*an Amazigh flag of the Berbers, these kind of things I do have, so people will see what my culture is*". In my interview with Rafik, 21-year-old moderator of the "Imazighen" group *Hyves* (<http://imazighen.hyves.nl/>) - a group for Moroccan-Dutch youths wanting to learn more about Berber identity in Morocco - He compares his group to the famous Dutch football club PSV Eindhoven *Hyves* group. "*On your personal profile page within the social networking site, you can list your interests, but you can also do this through group hyves. A PSV fan would join a PSV-groups hyves for instance*". The difference with the

football group site lays in the fact that the Imazighen *Hyves* concerns ethnic fandom. Rafik describes the goal of his site as follows:

My group Hyves concerns a group of people from North Africa, who are known as Imazighen. Imazighen means 'free people' and is a reaction to colonists, the Arabs, who wanted to impose their culture to the indigenous people of North Africa (the Imazighens). In almost all of North Africa this assimilation succeeded, however in Morocco and Algeria there are still Imazighen people who are conscious of their identity and history. Lots of them are in the Netherlands (and whose forefathers worked here in the Netherlands as guest workers) and to stimulate their search of identity (which is restricted in Morocco and Algeria) I have started this Hyves.

Rafik is himself aware of the fact that he provides *Hyves* users an avenue for ethnic identity expression. Instead of or next to becoming a fan of a famous soccer club, *Hyves* users can opt to join the “Imazighen” hyves to perform their ethnic affiliation online. On this page, Moroccan-Dutch youths expressed the Berber elements of their identities. The following English language exclamations posted on the message board are illustrative “☺♥IMAZIGHENNNNN !!! ♥☺” (June 3, 2009), “I LOVE AMAZIGH AMAZIGH IS THE BOOOOOOOM” (March 6, 2009), “Amazighen!! 4-Evaah” (August 18, 2008) and “Amazigh. My Pride. My Life” (April 11, 2008).



[Figure 7, 8 and 9 Archived from <http://imazighen.hyves.nl/> (September 19, 2009).]

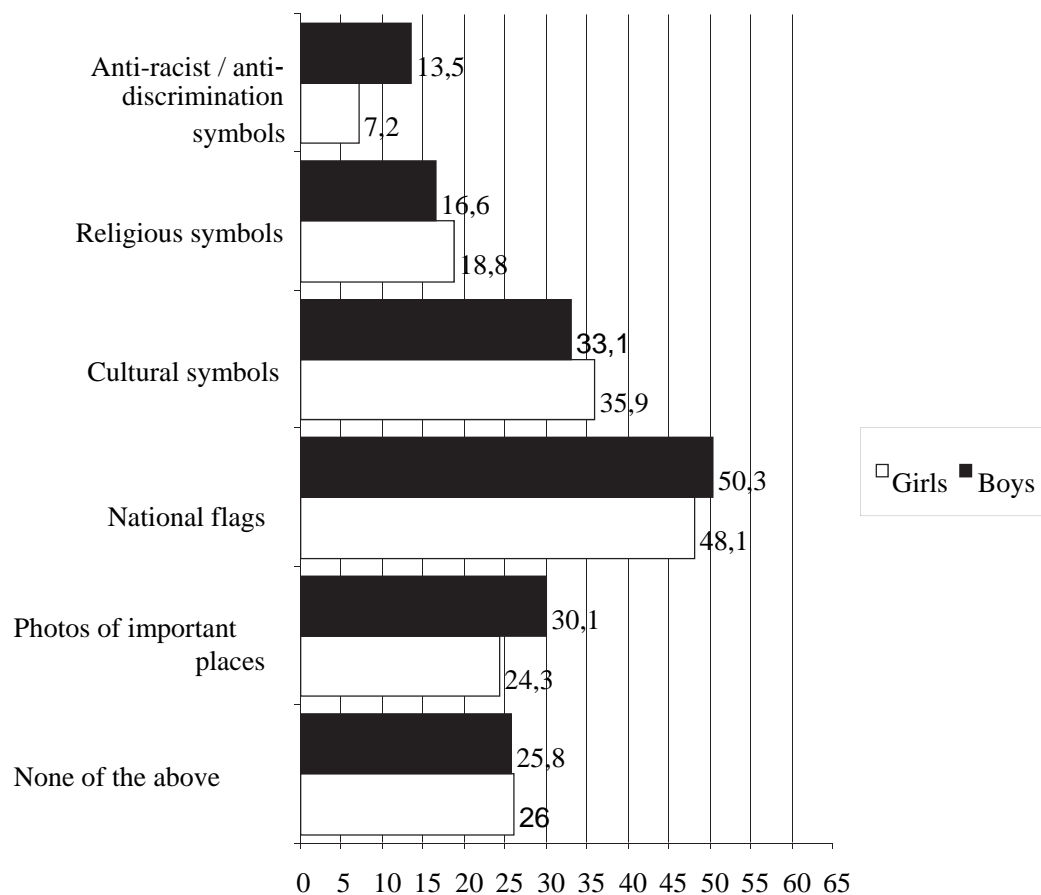
Figure 7 is an image uploaded to the group page that clearly displays how attributes are lifted from their original contexts to create new meanings. This act of visual poaching illustrates the intertextual dimensions of digital fandom. The image shows a cartoon figure of a fair-skinned youngster, holding a gun with the saying “I’m a Berber Soldier”. The picture presents a complex hybrid of symbols. Strikingly, the Aza, a central Berber symbol is included. It has traveled far. The Aza derives from an ancient alphabet and was taken up in the Berber alphabet. The Berber

movement included the Aza in the green blue, green and yellow Berber flag. Moroccan-Dutch youths have mixed the Aza with other expressions of global youth culture. The gun and textual exclamation are for instance expressions lifted from the contexts of global (English language) hip-hop toughness. Figure 8 shows Bart Simpson, the young and rebellious main character in the animated television series *The Simpsons* dressed up in clothes with the Moroccan red and green starred national flag. Adored by young people across the world for his disrespect for authority, he is depicted wearing a hoody sweater, and speaking into the microphone, again referencing to urban and street youth culture. Figure 9 shows how *Shin-chan* a character from a Japanese manga and anime series is dressed up in the Moroccan national flag as well. Shin-Chan normally never wears a cap, but Moroccan-Dutch young people have altered his appearance by placing a baseball cap over his head, which also features the flag. Furthermore, the slogans “Mocro power” and “Fuck Lonsdale” are included. Mocro power refers to the term mocro which originated on the streets of the Netherlands during the late 1990s and is now commonly seen as a Dutch honorary nickname for people of Moroccan-Dutch descent. “Fuck Lonsdale” is included as a reference to counter anti-immigration & right-wing extremists, who have adopted the sporting brand Lonsdale because it includes NSDA referring to the National Socialist German Workers' Party or Nazi party. These examples showcase how ethnicity is consumed through a detour of youth cultural re-embedding. The monitored group page is considered safe enough to publish textual and visual statements to an intended audience of fellow Berber identifying youths or interested individuals. Digital Berber and Moroccan fandom identification is one example of cultural self-profiling.

6-2. Cultural Self-profiling

With the Wired Up survey quantitative empirically grounded insights were generated on online self-profiling activities. The survey invited respondents to reflect on how they engage in various forms of online cultural self-profiling. From piloting and participant observations, a list with cultural self-profiling options was generated. The respondents were asked to select from this list which things they would link to and include on their profile page. Figure 10 provides the findings of (gender differences in) cultural self-profiling among Moroccan-Dutch youths.

A quarter of Moroccan-Dutch youths reported they do not put any of these cultural self-profiling things on their personal page. The option to include “national flags (Netherlands, Morocco, Turkey, Surinam, Curacao, etc)” was popular among boys and girls. Roughly half of them reported to incorporate their national flag on their profile page. More than boys, girls listed they would include “cultural symbols (windmills, Amazigh/Aza, Nazar etc)”, while boys more than girls chose for “pictures of important places (your street, neighborhood, holiday destination)”. Furthermore, “religious symbols (including Christian, Islamic, Jewish)”, were more frequently listed by girls, while including “anti-racist or anti-discrimination signs or texts”, was more popular among boys.



[Figure 10: Cultural Self-Profiling Moroccan-Dutch Youth (graph shows percentages, n = 344).]

During the follow-up interviews, informants expanded on the different cultural elements they incorporated in their self-presentations. Underlining ethnic proudness and wearing the headscarf as an important identity-marker, 13-year-old Inas describes her construction of a personal profile page as follows, “*it’s like, I’m wearing a headscarf. When I post a photo of me wearing a headscarf, you can so to say see that I have an Islamic background. And with my name and so on*”. Furthermore, interviewees report to highlight their attachment to for instance the Islam by showing they are a member of groups pertaining to Islam on their online profile page. Grasmuck, Martin and Zhao found that *Facebook* allows users to affirm their self-expressions, which is important as a “positive adjustment to diverse environments depends on the development of healthy cultural identities among adolescents and young adults” (2009, p. 180). However, Safae, 18-year-old, reported that signaling Muslim affinities sometimes backfires:

I have a girlfriend, and she wears a headscarf. On Hyves she got a message from someone

stating 'we live in 2010, a headscarf is outdated, it's something of the past'. That was bad, you can't say that. I feel that is discrimination.

This remark once again emphasizes offline social divisions also color digital behavior. As such ethnic and religious minorities sometimes remain space invaders in social networking sites. When informants engage in digital fandom practices and mark their ethnic or religious background they remain vulnerable to being dismissed as backward others by fellow users. However, in return, Moroccan-Dutch *Hyves* users actively respond to such acts of racism by disrupting stereotypes (see Leurs, Midden & Ponzanesi, 2012).

6-3. Differential Networking

Inspired by Midia's hyperlinked affiliations, the Wired Up survey was designed to capture differential profiling activities that stretch across and mix local, migratory and global affiliations. More specifically respondents were asked whether they show food, music and celebrity preferences on three locality dimensions (host, migrant or transnational cultures) on their profile page (table 2). For instance on the topic of celebrities the survey asked respondents to tick a box indicating whether they would show "Dutch celebrities (for example famous Dutch people, soap stars or sportsmen/ women)", "Famous migrants (for example Raymann, Najib Amhali or Moroccan, Turkish or Carribean" and "International stars (for example Hollywood, international footballer players, Bollywood). Respondents could click more than one option.

I zoom in on two themes in the self-profiling of Moroccan-Dutch and ethnic majority Dutch youths. Firstly, the table shows that compared to Moroccan-Dutch respondents, majority Dutch respondents participate relatively more in all three strands of Dutch self-profiling. More than girls, boys list Dutch food preferences, while girls list Dutch music and celebrities more. Conversely, Moroccan-Dutch respondents are more active in all three forms of migrant cultural self-profiling. Moroccan-Dutch boys list migrant background food and celebrities preferences more than girls, while they equally participate in migrant-background music profiling. Migrant self-profiling allows informants to highlight the diasporic element of their identity. One way to do so is joining a group related to Berber culture as I have discussed in the prior subsection. This feeling of affirmation both holds for Moroccan-Dutch as well as ethnic majority Dutch young people who report to include Dutch cultural food, music and celebrities on their page. It should thus be noted that opportunities to manifest ethnic dimensions of one's identity are taken up by both Moroccan-Dutch as well as majority Dutch youths. Singling out migrant affiliations among Moroccan-Dutch youths and Dutch affiliations among majority Dutch youths does however not paint the full picture.

<i>Self-profiling cultural affiliations</i>		<i>Moroccan-Dutch girls</i>	<i>Moroccan-Dutch Boys</i>	<i>ethnic majority-Dutch girls</i>	<i>ethnic majority-Dutch boys</i>
Self-profiling <i>Dutch</i> culture	Food	6.6	12.9	31.4	41.6
	Music	4.4	4.9	19.7	19.1
	Celebrities	8.3	12.9	24.7	19.1
Self-profiling <i>migrant</i> cultures	Food	40.3	48.5	16.3	18.2
	Music	61.3	61.3	17.2	24.4
	Celebrities	48.6	51.5	7.1	12
Self-profiling <i>international</i> cultures	Food	30.9	36.2	32.6	34
	Music	61.9	40.5	82.8	71.3
	Celebrities	30.9	28.2	40.2	34.4
I do not include the following preferences	Food	16	23.3	55.2	44
	Music	48.6	41.7	21.2	14.2
	Celebrities	37.6	36.8	48.1	53.1

[Table 2: Cultural Self-profiling

(n= 344 Moroccan-Dutch and 448 ethnic majority Dutch respondents)]

The differences between the groups in terms of their self-profiling global cultural affiliations are generally smaller and more ambiguous. The results indicate (printed bold in the table) that international affiliations constitute the liminal space of intercultural encounter for ethnic majority Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch young people. At least almost one third of every Moroccan-Dutch boy or girl and ethnic majority Dutch boy or girl participates in profiling international food and celebrities preferences. The category of music preferences is a more prominent space of intercultural grouping as two thirds of Moroccan Dutch girls and 40 percent of boys and over two thirds of ethnic majority Dutch boys and girls selected it. This two-sidedness of cultural self-profiling (identification with ethnic and international markers) can be drawn out on the basis of the dynamics of cultural identification as recognized by various postcolonial theorists. Stuart Hall sees cultural identification characterized by historical, collectively shared “continuous frames of reference and meaning” (1990, p. 223). However, he argues that cultural identity is also subject to simultaneous transformation; it remains “a matter of ‘becoming’” (1990, p. 225).

6-4. Conviviality and Intercultural Encounters

Paul Gilroy distinguishes between institutionalized multiculturalism and everyday multiculturalism.

Beyond political, governmental, scholarly and mainstream media understandings of the failure of multiculturalism, he sees multiculturalism in action from the bottom-up and refers to this as “conviviality” of cohabitation. Conviviality offers a way to acknowledge the potential for empowerment in interactional processes that render “multiculture an ordinary feature of social life” (Gilroy, 2005, p. xv). The hyperlinking practices of Midia, Anas and Ryan and the survey findings suggest that everyday multiculturalism can be observed in action, in the (Dutch) digital realm as well. People with a variety of affiliations encounter one another as they digitally mediate their everyday lived experiences and fandom affiliations.

Hyperlink practices on social networking sites allow Moroccan-Dutch youths to express innovative networked forms of belonging in their dealing with oppositional ethnic, gendered, religious and youth cultural motivations of continuity and change. Intercultural encounters take place in the networked space of global cultural belongingness. On *Hyves* and *Facebook*, by showing different dimensions of one’s identity users can stake out their individuality. In the words of my informants, 13-year-old Ilham compares digital spaces and describes that on MSN “*you see one side of someone*” while a profile page “*allows you to show more of yourself*”. 18-year-old Mustafa notes, “*you see how open a person can be, that he has a lot of fun, because a whole lot of information can be put up about a person*”. He adds that when profile visitors notice the different elements someone puts on his page this “*may provide a better glance at the life of a person, so you cannot really dismiss someone like ‘oh yeah that’s him and he is like that’*”. Analyzing hypertextual narratives of selves reveals how identities are neither fixed nor singular but are dynamically constructed at the crossroads of different affiliations.

Online social networking sites such as *Hyves* and *Facebook* therefore can be said to offer a glance at everyday multiculturalism or conviviality. Individuals hyperlink to cultural affiliations that are generally seen as incompatible. The space where hypertextual selves gather is space of digital interaction where heterogeneity and diversity can become ordinary. As an example of how youth cultures include intercultural encounters, joining groups in social networking sites offer ethnic minority and majority youths a platform for self-expression, cross-cultural exchange and active encounter. Fostering multiplicity by bringing different orientations together, youth culture may offer grounds for the contestation of racisms, nationalisms and ethnic absolutisms.

Hypertextual performativity of self in the production of digital space in social networking sites is however not always simply enabling. Users are economically exploited as online social networking sites collect personal data, including the hyperlinks user make, that are sold for niche-marketing purposes. Safae’s remarks on online discrimination remind us that ethnic-cultural and religious expressions such as wearing a headscarf do not meet the mainstream norm of *Hyves*’ expressive culture. Also, peer pressure impacts on the ways young people articulate their hypertextual selves, comparable to how peer expectations have an influence over the way users

self-photograph themselves along the lines of gender and sexuality. From a reaction by Mustafa I learned that peer-pressure dynamics are also at work in joining groups:

when many people have joined something, you may think 'oh that is [ok] or 'I don't really think it would be nice to belong to it, but I do join after all, because many people have joined'. [Sometimes you may feel as if] you do not do it for yourself, but for someone else.

Trinh T. Minh-ha states that fragmentation denotes a way of living with differences at the margins, where “one finds oneself, in the context of cultural hybridity always pushing one’s questioning of oneself to the limit of what one is and what one is not” (1992, pp. 156-157). This process of questioning oneself is complicated further as teenagers with a migration background also have to negotiate whether or not to conform to – sometimes demanding – varying peer norms and expectations.

In sum, hypertextual selves performed on personal profile pages may be taken to reflect the multiplicity of Moroccan-Dutch youths identification. Hypertext as an in-between space where different points of articulation can meet and in-between identities can be expressed presents a strong example of how emancipation can be fostered through bottom-up multicultural interaction. However, racism, victimization, peer pressure, surveillance and commercial incentives leave their imprint on the ways Moroccan-Dutch youths articulate their graphical narrative of self and engage in intercultural encounters with various social networking site users.

7. Conclusions

In this article, I focused on visual representations and hyperlinking practices as two distinct ways the self is performed on social networking sites. I described that technological restrictions, user cultures, corporate motives and peer norms shape a particular age, gender, and religiosity-based politics of social networking sites. The informants follow critical cues of their peers about what to show in their profile photos and I argued that popularity and attractiveness (key facets to the life stage of adolescence) explain the gendered photographic self-depiction ideals. Certain versions of femininity and masculinity were found to be hegemonic. These are powerful ideological models, to which users aspire in order to achieve social acceptance, make new friends, find romance and gain popularity. Achieved through interactions but abiding by hegemonic standards, some young people may find empowerment by being in charge of their to-be-looked-at-ness and may feel self-confident in successfully attracting a wide audience to their profile page. For girls I argued this means taking a narcissistic submissive pose reflecting awareness of the heterosexual masculine gaze. Bodies are disciplined to meet these expectations, but versions of hegemonic femininity are increasingly becoming unattainable leading to frustration and a loss of (peer-generated) self-worth. Additionally,

exposing oneself implies susceptibility to victimization practices (“brooming”) that may put an end to the sense of agency users may have developed.

Additionally, I turned to analyze in-between forms of identification in social-networking sites. I assessed how hypertextual selves are articulated through fandom forms of cultural self-profiling. Forming a response to discrimination and exclusion, Moroccan-Dutch youths turn to more positive experiences such as identification with their descent and/or their religion in social networking sites. They are also inspired by global culture. In their cultural-self profiling on line, the younger generations not only tap into migrant heritage elements. Rather than a straightforward continuation of cultural legacies of their parents, such individuals are actively transforming those in ways that resonate with the dominant global youth cultures in which they grow up. Hypertextual selves was taken up as a figuration to acknowledge bottom-up representation of decentered identities that signal the bankruptcy of the clichéd, narrow image of Moroccan-Dutch youths. Furthermore hyperlinks can be followed as personal trajectories of intercultural encounters with multiple others in the space of social networking sites. Considering hypertextual in-between positioning of Moroccan-Dutch youths in their interaction with young users of a variety of backgrounds as a form of convivial networked belonging not only helps to produce a new understanding of multiculturalism, but also assists in discovering the emancipatory possibilities in everyday culture.

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Straddle Two Worlds: The Use of Social Networking Sites among Chinese Expatriates in the United States

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1. Introduction

With billions of people around the globe engaging in online social networking, there is a growing interest to examine the use of social networking sites (SNSs) as an emerging cultural and social phenomenon. boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNSs 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 who they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others. Despite the similarities among SNSs, they (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.210-11) note that “the nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” and that despite some technologically consistent feature, SNSs are diverse in their technological affordance, user demographics, online activities, and social contexts that emerge through them (Hargittai, 2007; Baym 2011).

Current studies on SNSs largely focus on a specific platform used by a native population, usually American-based. However, the actual usage of SNSs varies considerably across global regions. A map put together by French newspaper *Le Monde* (2008) documented national difference in SNS usage: Orkut used to dominate Latin America; Bebo was most popular in Europe; Friendster was the most preferred SNS in Indonesia. And some regional sites like CyWorld was immensely successful in South Korea and Mixi in Japan. Although, Facebook is rapidly gaining its domination internationally (e.g. Facebook is the most popular SNS in Europe, according to recent data). It is still important to consider the cross-cultural differences in terms of SNSs adoption and usage. Recent studies have shown that users of different SNSs display different online practices. For example, using observation and ethnographic interviews, Chapman and Lehav (2008) conducted their pioneering research about the usage patterns of social networking services in multiple cultures. They found that users of American SNSs like to broadcast personal information by sharing personal pictures and activities, while users of French SNSs like to discuss interests and hobbies that are less personal; users of Chinese SNSs like to play games and display person status through site decoration; and users of Korean SNSs like to sharing photos only with family and close friends. Another study (Cho, 2010) showed that compared to American-based SNSs, users of Cyworld, a Korean-based SNS, have fewer but more intimate friends, use more non-verbal communication means (e.g., graphic or icons) and exhibit lesser but more personal self-disclosure. One lesson to take away from these comparative studies is that “researchers should tread lightly when generalizing

from studies about the use of one SNS to the use of another such service” (Hargittai, 2007). Instead of focusing on a single site or reduce the user groups to a single entity with uniform outcomes, more valuable efforts can be made through comparative research exploring the differences among technically similar sites and the social consequence of those variations (Baym, 2011).

2. Theoretical Framework

Current comparative studies on SNSs generally approach the issues from either a macro-based or micro-based perspective. Macro-based studies focus on the cultural difference, especially national differences. Research conducted from this theoretical perspective suggests that online practices tend to reflect the corresponding characteristics of the national culture in which the SNS is hosted. Whereas American-based SNS culture being perceived as more individualistic-oriented and Asian-based SNS culture being more collectivistic-oriented (Qiu & Leung, 2012). Correspondently, users of American-based SNS tend to have wider social networks and a more direct communication style, while users of Asian-based SNS tend to have tighter social relationships with more indirect communication style. Micro-based studies applied Erving Goffman’s situationist theory to understand different individual practices on SNSs. Situationist theory argues that people react based on context rather than fixed psychological traits. Marwick and boyd (2010) suggests that social media technologies collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, making it challenging for users to navigate different social situations. Therefore, each individual content producer needs to imagine potential audience and adopt a variety of techniques to target different audiences in their use of SNSs.

Both macro-based and micro-based research recognized that SNS users can flexibly adapt to their online environment. While macro-based perspective suggests that online environment can be largely influenced by the users’ national culture (sometimes this is conflated with where the SNS platform is based, but the international user base of Facebook make the national identity of the users more important than the location of the server.), micro-based research focus on the question of the online audience, to whom the identity and self-presentation are constructed. In the context of SNS, the composition of articulated connections enables SNS users to imagine their audience into being and navigate their online environment accordingly (boyd 2006). Previous studies on cross-cultural comparison on SNS usage are usually conducted from a macro-based perspective. Different online behaviors of international users are largely contributed to cultural difference based on user’s national identities. Most micro-based research to date on SNS has focused on a single online platform (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) by a specific group (e.g. young adults in the U.S.).

Recently, a growing number of studies have paid attention to individuals who are participants of multiple SNSs. By comparing different online behaviors among the same group of individuals, these studies identified cultural differences across different SNSs (Qiu et al. 2012). However, these

cultural differences are not intrinsic, but are perceived and negotiated by its users. Nowhere is this negotiation and adaptation better seen than in bicultural or multicultural individuals. Lin et al. (2011) conducted a research focusing primarily on the outcomes of Facebook use during international students' study in the USA. The researchers found that Facebook usage contributed to students' ability to participate socially and culturally in their new surroundings. Those students who interacted with their U.S. friends on Facebook were better socially adjusted. They also found that out of the international students surveyed, 46% of students indicated a social networking site other than Facebook was their primary account. In their survey research with Chinese undergrad students in a large Singaporean university, Qiu et al showed evidence that bicultural users of SNSs flexibly switch their online behaviors in response to the online community in which they are. They found that these Chinese students perform more benevolent in-group sharing when they participate in Chinese-based SNS (Renren) and less so when they participate in the American based SNS (Facebook). According to Qiu et al., these behavioral differences are related to cross-cultural differences between Facebook and Renren. In specific, participants in this study perceive the Renren culture to be more collectivistic than the Facebook culture. The practice of behavioral switching across different SNSs is interpreted as a natural adaptation to match different online cultures. Although culture is often reflected by or perceived through collective practices (Geertz, 1973), there is little evidence to suggest that the online culture in any SNS is intrinsic and uniform among its users, even for those who shared similar social backgrounds. The formation of online culture is a dynamic process, rather than a kind of static property.

3. Method and Samples

Using profile analysis and interviews, this study examine how young Chinese expatriates living in the U.S. (young professional migrants holding F-1 student visa and H1-B working visa) navigate two popular SNSs, Facebook and Renren. There are several reasons why these young professional expatriates from China are interesting to study: First, contemporary migrants are highly motivated to keep contacts with relatives and families living in the home country through media and communication technologies (Miller & Madianou 2012; Karim 2003; Dahan & Sheffer 2001) Since the adoption and actual use of technologies are highly correlated with education and age, young professional migrants are frequently on the cutting edge of technology adoption; Second, due to government censorship, overseas Chinese are navigating a quite different media environment after migration (e.g. access to popular SNSs like Facebook and Twitter is blocked from mainland China); Third, with world largest number of Internet users, China is under dramatic social transformation. Current studies about how the use of media technologies may facilitate this transformation focus mainly on the local population. However, the growing number of young Chinese Diasporas could play an increasingly important role in this process that shouldn't be ignored by researchers.

To investigate behavioral differences and their implications in social networking, I am planning research to occur in three phases. Phase 1 uses profile analysis of a small number of selected samples to establish a baseline of cultural knowledge and to form interview questions. Respondent's profile pages on Facebook and Renren were collected, based on consent agreement. The contents (including status updates, pictures, and networks) are analyzed. Phase 2 use in-depth interviews followed by the same sample identified in phase 1. Interview sessions were approximately 1 hour and consisted of semi-structured questions. These interviews will assess users' history with Facebook and Renren, self-reported usage patterns, motivations and preferences.

This study is currently in Phase 2 and has collected data from 15 individuals. The target samples are young professionals, aged 18-34, native speakers of Chinese, currently live in the U.S. with either student or working visa, who have a profile page on both Facebook and Renren, active users (at least once per week) of at least one of the two sites.

4. Preliminary Findings

Based on a preliminary analysis of a total of 15 users' online profiles and follow-up interviews, this research has identified the following characteristics in use of Facebook and Renren:

4-1. Differences in Users' Goals

Despite similarities on many technological functions and interfaces between Facebook and Renren, most young professional Chinese expatriates use these two platforms to fulfill different goals. For example, a female Chinese graduate student suggest that Facebook is mainly use for entertainment, "If I want to take a break from the task I am currently working at, I would go to Facebook, checking out trivia things with an empty mind." Other respondents also commented their interaction with Facebook as more "passive" than their use of Renren. However, "passive" doesn't mean they are simply lurking on the site (though some of them do) without "creating" any contents. It is a descriptive word they use to indicate their mindset and emotional engagement when using Facebook. As another male respondent, who actually spent many hours checking Facebook on a daily basis, described: "Checking my Facebook page is like breathing my teeth every morning after breakfast, it becomes a habit but I don't really expect to get anything meaningful out of it... maybe it helped to keep me awake." In contrast, 10 out of the 15 respondents indicated their engagement with Renren is actually more "active," with clear goals rather than "killing time mindlessly" on Facebook. These goals include checking out old friends' profile activities, sharing useful information regarding travelling and life in the U.S., reconnecting with old friends especially when they plan to visit China during the coming vocations.

Although previous research (e.g. Qiu. et al. 2012) suggests that Renren culture is perceived to be more collectivistic than Facebook among Chinese students in Singapore, the respondents in my

study didn't report any significant cultural difference between these two platforms. Instead, many respondents considered Renren as the "Copycat" of Facebook, "Chinese Facebook." But some of them pointed out a unique feature of using Renren: it not only records who and how many have visited you and posts the visit information on the profile page, while you don't really know who has visited your page besides those people that left comments constantly. Although not everybody prefer using this feature, those who do pointed out that this may create better knowledge about their "audience" and general context for further interactions. Some respondents suggest this feature make them feel the context is more "intimate" on Renren than on Facebook. Checking out someone's Renren profile page is interpreted as an action of caring or at least curiosity. To avoid misunderstanding, Renren users tend to browsing the "newsfeed" rather than visiting people's profile pages randomly. Although all of the respondents have stayed in U.S. for more than 2 years and either actively pursue a degree in U.S. institution or work for a U.S. company, 11 out of the 15 respondents have larger number of "friends" on Renren than on Facebook. Most of these contacts on Renren are social networks in China, but also includes local networks that shared the same ethnic background. Although it is problematic to generalize the pattern based on non-random small sample here, those who had more connections on Renren tend to post on Renren more often than on Facebook.

4-2. Difference in Self-expression

SNSs construct an interesting field for self-expression. SNSs flatten multiple audiences into one, a phenomenon known as "context collapse": the requirements to present a verifiable, singular identity makes it impossible to differ self-presentation strategies, creating tension as diverse groups of people flock to social network sites (boyd, 2008). To navigate these tensions, social network site users may adopt the lowest-common denominator to only post things they believe their broadest group of acquaintances will find non-offensive (Marwick, 2005). Respondents of this study experienced the tension of "context collapse" on their encounter with Renren and Facebook, but different tactics are employed to address this issue. On Facebook, the most common strategy is to use the language to demarcate the "boundary." Some respondents reported intentionally written in Chinese when posting on Facebook, so that only their Chinese networks could respond to certain messages. And if they post in English, it is expected that the message was targeted for a general audience, including all their English-speaking friends. Most respondents showed less concern about their reputation and privacy when using Renren, even though many of them have larger number of potential "audience" on Renren. More personal information is shared on Renren than on Facebook. For example, a graduate student, who is equally active in using both platforms, only post her recent break-ups as a blog entry on Renren, but nothing about her relationship was shared on Facebook. Actually, unlike Facebook, Renren didn't have a specific relationship status option in the profile. People were more open to share unpleasant news on Renren than on Facebook. Another grad student

who only use Renren and Facebook occasionally, wrote a blog entry describing his unexpected dropped-out from a graduate program. Renren becomes the virtual space for emotional outlets for stressful moments in these Chinese expatriates' lives. Higher level of trust among the Renren networks and geographic distance lead to more self-revealing than concealing among Chinese expatriates on Chinese-based platforms.

Recently, researchers have emphasized the important role of Internet-based communication for international migrants. A form of hybrid space is constructed through the use of transnational media where cultural minority groups can mediate affinities and difference of the home and host cultures. The use of multiple social network sites allows migrants to connect to their original culture and old social ties at home, but at the same time, learn norms and values of the host society. Several respondents admitted that they would spend some time "browsing" their American classmates' and colleagues' profile page to get some background knowledge, especially when they are supposed to have some offline interactions with those Americans. They would even adopt similar style of expression from their American counterparts, especially when they post something in English. But real cross-cultural communication (e.g., commenting on each other's post) is rare on Facebook, even though all respondents have significant number of Americans in their networks. Many respondents realized these Facebook American "friends" are superficial and unlikely to generate substantial social capital as some media scholars envisioned. But they still felt a sense of "acceptance" and "connections" when these cross-national connections were initiated and maintained on Facebook. As one undergraduate student who comment, "In many cases, observing the profile is the closet I am able to get to them, both literally and figuratively." One common practice to maintain the connections between Chinese expatriates and Americans is through tagging pictures on Facebook. More pictures are shared and tagged on Facebook than on Renren among Chinese expatriates. Actually, one of the most common updates generated on Facebook is photo posted or tagged by people within their networks. These images create an "illusion" of togetherness and connectivity.

4-3. Difference in Sharing Behaviors

Qiu et al. (2012) suggest that the culture of Renren is more collectivistic than that of Facebook, with Chinese users who participated in both online communities perceiving Renren cultures as being more sharing-oriented, conformity-oriented. These two platforms do not differ technically on system performance, data security, and user friendliness of their sharing functions. Same SNS users would perform more in-group sharing on Renren than on Facebook, thus flexibly switching their sharing behaviors in response to the online culture they are in. I found a similar trend in my research with Chinese expatriates in the United States. They are more likely to share information on Renren than on Facebook. And the information they shared on Renren is perceived to be more personal or valuable.

According to Arjun Appadurai (1996), media and communication technologies have facilitated the emergence of diasporic public spheres. Public spheres in the present day, he argues, are no longer confined to the national boundaries but are constituted by migrant across various sites. Guobin Yang (2002) in his study of the use of Internet for social activism in China argue that the online Chinese cultural sphere approximates a transnational diasporic public sphere, for it allows dispersed individuals and groups to gather and interact with one another to articulate personal, local, and global problems, and facilitates various forms of political activism and collective action. Unlike their fellow citizens living in mainland China, Chinese expatriates in U.S. can have easy access to many government censored sites related Chinese politics and social problems. However, very few of them have been actively looking for political-related information online. But based on my content analysis with the materials Chinese expatriates shared on Renren and Facebook, there were noticeable discussion and even debate regarding China-related issues on Renren. For example, during the recent London Olympics, several respondents post information regarding the Chinese badminton scandal. Some of these posts generated heated debate among overseas Chinese and their fellow citizens in China. The Chinese state media insisted that the International Olympic Committee should shoulder some responsibility of the scandal. Many local Chinese believe the international organizations have adopted some “double-standard” in their judgments. However, the Chinese expatriates were more critical in their reaction to the scandal. Several of them even challenged the status quo by suggesting not the Chinese players, but their coaches and related Chinese officials who managed “behind the curtain” deserve criticism and punishment for their violation of the Olympic spirit. In contrast, critical comments and debates are rare to find on Facebook. Most China-related information shared by Chinese expatriates are quite positive on Facebook. Several respondents have shared artistic pictures of their hometown on their Facebook profile page. A video clips from President Obama’s greeting to Asian American during the Spring Festival was widely circulated among Chinese diasporic Facebook networks. A respondent explicitly express her concern to post negative reading of Chinese issues on Facebook, “the U.S. media is already quite biased towards China, why would we want to make things even worse?” Even though cross-cultural interaction was rare on their use of Facebook, many Chinese expatriates do believe Facebook could act as a window for their American contacts to get to know China and Chinese culture. For Chinese expatriates, self-censorship is more common in their use of Facebook while government censorship is associated with Renren. For example, blogs containing sensitive keywords like “Tiananmen Square massacre,” “Falun Gong” cannot be published. Some respondents suggest that if they want to discuss something controversial or sensitive on Renren, they would rather share the post written by some micro-celebrities, rather than write original texts by themselves.

5. Discussion

This study extends the previous research regarding SNS usage by comparing the actual activities and interpretations within two technically similar, but socially distinctive platforms. By identifying differences across SNSs, one may better understand how online culture is constructed among different social groups. Facebook is enormously popular in the US and is rapidly gaining its domination internationally. According to the latest data, Facebook has 955 million active users and approximately 81% of them living outside the U.S. and Canada (Facebook 2012). With the rise of its international users, it is important to consider the implications of different cultural and social background related to the online activities of its users. Research based on the comparison of users from different social background would contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of the social dimension of the new media technologies.

According to Castells (1997), the Internet can trigger the loss of legitimizing original identity for migrants, whereas it can help the creation of a project identity, a new identity no longer based on criteria such as country of origin or ethnicity but on the symbolic reality offered via the cultural medium. The proliferation of social media make it possible for migrants to flexibly switching their identity performance to fit in with the online environment, which are not necessarily determined by geographic locations. This study concentrates on migrants on temporary visa that highlights their in-between subjectivity and how their perception of themselves and others shape their use of SNSs and vice versa.

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Invited Paper

A Cross-National Empirical Study of Social Network Sites: Cognitive Absorption, Network Externalities and TAM Perspectives

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Abstract

Social network sites (SNSs) are likely to become increasingly popular in the near future, and the users of social network sites increase at an astonishing rate. So it may become an important means of interpersonal communication. Few studies have focused on the adoption and acceptance of SNS with cognitive absorption and network externality. Nor have previous research investigated into SNS by cross-national comparison perspective. The purpose of this study is to extend technology adoption model (TAM) with cognitive absorption and network externality to examine whether the research framework validly measures the user behavioral intention and actual usage behavior of social network sites in different countries, including Taiwan and US. This study uses survey method to collect the data and uses Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach to analyze the data and examine the effects of variables. The empirical results support the importance of cognitive absorption and network externality in considering SNS acceptance, and also show that the research framework has strong explanation power in Taiwan and US. Moreover, the results also find that the differences in predicting the users' adoption of social network sites in two different countries. Thus, the results of our study provide several implications to practitioners and researchers for future research.

Key words: Cognitive Absorption, Network Externality, Social Network Sites.

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1. Introduction

Social network sites (SNS) are recent computer-mediated communication technology and received attention for their wide variety of web technologies including audio-visual support, user-customized, multi-media contents, multiple communication mechanisms and fascinated on-line games. Within just five to ten years, SNS have rapidly grown in popularity throughout the world, and the use of SNS has become an international phenomenon. Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined SNS 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, (3) view and traverse their list of connection and those made by others within the systems. SNS is the websites where users can exchange digital information, such as pictures, videos, text, blogs and hyperlinks between users with common interests. Thus, SNS can facilitate communications and information sharing across the Internet. The popularity of SNS, such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Plurk, Bebo, and Cyworld, has increased significantly in recent years.

Although there is much discussion in the popular press about how people are using social network sites. Seldom previous studies have focused on the empirical research about the determinants contributing to a person's SNS usage intention and actual usage behavior. The success of SNS development depends on the combination of user acceptance and advancements in technology. According to technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1986) which is one of the best-known approaches to explain user acceptance of information systems, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two most important factors determining system intention and usage. And much research had been conducted to prove TAM. Previous research (Davis, 1989; Davis et al., 1989; Adams et al., 1992; Szajna, 1994; Chau, 1996; Agarwal & Prasad, 1997; Bhattacharjee, 2001; Wober & Gretzel, 2000; Hong et al., 2001; Chau & Hu, 2001; Chen & Lou, 2002) examined the acceptance of new technology such as email, voice mail, spreadsheet, graphic systems and decision support system, etc.

However, there are other factors that influence behavioral intention and actual usage behavior of SNS, for example, cognitive absorption and network externality effect. Some empirical evidence shows that the importance of cognitive absorption on user beliefs and intentions (Saade & Bahli, 2005; Shang et al., 2005; Wakefield & Whitten, 2006). Based on literature by Rohlfs (1974) and Katz and Shapiro (1985), network externality is the characteristic of change in product value according to the number of users. That is, the utility that a user derives from consuming a good or product increases as the number of consumers of the same good or product also increases (Katz & Shapiro, 1986). Much research proved that user perceptions regarding network externalities have a positive impact on using new technology, such as electronic communication systems and interactive information technology (Strader et al., 2007; Lin & Bhattacharjee, 2008; Sledgianowski & Kulviwat, 2009). Hence, user acceptance of an SNS may be determined not only by perceived usefulness and

perceived ease of use, but also by cognitive absorption and network externality effect.

Based on the previous literature, seldom studies have focused on the adoption and acceptance of SNS with cognitive absorption and network externality. Nor have previous research investigated into SNS by cross-national comparison perspective. The purpose of this study is to extend TAM with cognitive absorption and network externality to examine whether the research framework will be valid measured the user behavioral intention and actual usage behavior of social network sites in different countries, including Taiwan and US. These issues about SNS are important because it becomes increasingly popular recently, and may become an important means of interpersonal communication and information sharing worldwide in near future.

This study selects Taiwan and US to examine the differences of users' attitude and usage toward SNS for the reasons below. First, the two countries have high internet usage rate. US have the largest online user population except for China. There are 223 million internet users in US. On the other hand, there are 14.76 million online populations in Taiwan, more than half the Taiwanese population (ClickZ, 2010). Furthermore, US boasts the largest number of social media and blog users, with 142.1 million unique visitors, followed by Japan and Brazil, which had 46.6 million and 31.3 million unique visitors (Nielsenwire, 2010). These statistics show that US have high internet usage rate and the largest number of users with social media and blog.

Second, this study chooses Taiwan and US as research target in order to get data from culturally different countries that generate more comparable and significant results. Taiwan and U.S. are different on their cultural dimensions. According to Hofstede's (1991) and Huang (1995), Taiwanese are collectivist (score: 17), large power distance (score: 58) and long-term orientation (score: 87). In contrast to Taiwanese, the cultural dimensions in US are individualist (score: 91), small power distance (score: 40) and a short-term orientation (score: 29). According to previous studies, people might have different perceptions and usage of computer and Internet in different cultures. Other research (Brosnan & Lee, 1998; Collis & Williams, 1987) also suggests that students' attitudes and usage toward computers are related to certain cultural and background characteristics. Therefore, the two countries which have different levels of cultural dimensions could have differences in individual attitudes and usage of information and communication technologies. This study selects Taiwan and US to examine the research framework and makes a contribution to the extant literature.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2-1. Technology Acceptance Model: TAM

Based on theories in social psychology, such as the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985), TAM has been recognized as a powerful and simple framework for explaining the end-users acceptance of new information

technology (Shen & Eder, 2009). TAM is an extension of TRA, which explains individuals' behavior on the basis of their beliefs and intentions. The original TAM proposes that intention to use a technology is significantly influenced by the user's beliefs of the two key constructs: perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) of the technology. PEOU is the perception that using a specific technology requires no additional effort. Furthermore, PU is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance (Davis, 1989).

End-users would tend to base on the perception of usefulness from the new system and then decide whether to use the new system. The empirical salience of PU in influencing IT usage intention has been validated in numerous TAM studies. Saade and Bahli (2005) and Lin and Bhattacharjee (2008) applied extended TAM to predict the determinants of internet or World Wide Web usage.

They found PU and PEOU, as well as other external variables had relationship to user BI toward using online learning system and instant message. Furthermore, the users believe a new system is useful but not easy to use; the users are less likely to use it because of the opportunity cost about time and effort (Davis et al., 1989). Thus, PEOU is important because it would affect PU, attitude and intention. There are extensive empirical evidences accumulated over a decade that PEOU is significantly linked to intention, both directly and indirectly via its impact on perceived usefulness (Davis et al., 1989; Venkatesh, 1999). Moreover, PU is a predictor of user intention to use a new IT, while PEOU influence PU significantly. Both PU and PEOU influence individual's behavioral intention to use the system (Fliegel & Kivlin, 1966; Ostlund, 1974; Zaltman et al., 1973; Tornatzky & Klein, 1982; Szajna, 1996). If the users think the new technology is useful and easy to use, their intention to use is stronger. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H1: Perceived ease of use positively influences perceived usefulness of SNS.

H2: Perceived ease of use positively influences behavioral intention to use SNS.

H3: Perceived usefulness of SNS positively influences behavioral intention to use SNS.

The relationship between information technology usage intention and usage behavior is empirically proved in numerous previous studies on information technology usage (Davis et al., 1989; Loiacono et al., 2007; Taylor & Todd, 1995). Rogers (1995) defines adoption intention as an individual's intention to use, acquire or purchase a technology innovation. According to TAM theory, behavioral intention to use is the precursor of actual usage of computer technology. A lot of empirical studies prove the relationship between behavioral intention and actual usage behavior. For example, Davis et al. (1989) found that behavior intention was significantly correlated with usage and confirmed that computer usage can be predicted from intentions. Taylor and Todd (1995) found that behavioral intention played an important role in predicting usage behavior. Furthermore,

Venkatesh and Davis (2000) also prove that behavior intention can well predict actual usage behavior. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H4: Behavioral intention to use SNS positively influences actual SNS usage behavior.

2-2. Cognitive Absorption

Absorption is defined as an individual disposition or trait, for example, an intrinsic dimension of personality that led to episodes of total attention where all of an individual's attentional resources are consumed by the object of attention. The earliest conceptions of this notion were offered by Tellegen and Atkinson (1974). Previous study on individual psychology has confirmed that holistic experiences with technology as captured in a construct such as cognitive absorption which derive from technology interactions and are internal to the users (Agarwal et al., 1997; Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000). Cognitive absorption (CA) construct represents one form of intrinsic motivation which is "a behavior is performed for itself, in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity" (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, 1997). The theoretical basis derives from three closely inter-related streams, including the personality trait of absorption, flow state and cognitive engagement (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000). First, the trait of absorption, in the study of Tellegen and Atkinson (1974), refers to individuals' state of deep attention, where they are totally absorbed with the event being experienced. Second, the theory of flow, in the study of Csikszentmihalyi (1975), describes the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. And flow experience is a multi-dimensional construct including a sense of intense concentration, a feeling of control, a loss of consciousness and a temporal transformation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is an important antecedent of attitudes towards technology, and it is a variable of comprehending human-technology interactions. Third, Webster and Ho (1997) consider cognitive engagement as individual subjective experience of human-computer interaction. The concept relates to playfulness: it includes the dimensions of intrinsic interest, curiosity and attention focus without necessarily the feeling of being in control (Webster & Hackley, 1997).

This study describes CA as "a state of deep involvement with software", that is exhibited through five dimensions: temporal dissociation, focused immersion, heightened enjoyment, control, and curiosity (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000). In the literature proved that CA shows the potential for intrinsic motivations to promote TAM (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000; Venkatesh, 2000). Moreover, some empirical evidence exhibits that the importance of CA on user beliefs and intentions in IT usage (Saade & Bahli, 2005; Shang et al., 2005; Wakefield & Whitten, 2006). Shoham (2004) indicated that virtual community members tend to display temporal dissociation, focused immersion and control dimensions associated with CA with their community via online interactions and feedback functions. Although TAM has been used to predict acceptance of IT, little is known about

the intrinsic motivations such as CA to SNS users.

Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) establish the connection between cognitive absorption and PEOU through the five dimensions, including temporal dissociation, focus immersion, heightened enjoyment, control, and curiosity. Agarwal et al. (1997) argued that CA influences individual PEOU of specific systems; namely, the intrinsically motivating state of cognitive absorption reduces the perceived cognitive burden associated with the task because the individual is experiencing pleasure and willing to expend more effort on a task. The lower cognitive burden results in a perception that the technology is easier to use. In order to establish the relevance of CA as a predictor of PEOU, attention needs to be focused on other key determinants of this belief (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000). Venkatesh and Davis (1996) postulated and presented empirical support for self-efficacy which is a significant key antecedent of cognitive absorption. Self-efficacy is reflective of confidence in one's ability to perform a particular task (Bandura, 1997). While recognizing self-efficacy as a predictor of PEOU, CA can also be treated as an additional salient influence (Agarwal & Karahanna 2000). In sum, confidence and CA which is an individual intrinsically motivator can together lower cognitive burden. And the lower cognitive burden results in a perception that the technology is easier to use. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Cognitive absorption positively influences perceived ease of use.

Cognitive absorption might have a salient influence on PU. The proposed relationship between CA and PU derive its foundations from innate human tendencies and is based on self-perception theory (Bem, 1972). Self-perception theory argues that individuals seek to rationalize their actions and reduce cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1976), which arises when an individual holds two inconsistent cognitive structures at the same time. As users stay a state of CA, irrelevant thoughts and perceptions are filtered out and their attentions are focused entirely on the interaction. It results in an extremely satisfying state of mind (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). In other words, while in a state of CA, the individual is experiencing gratification and pleasure from the task which they are interacting. Based on the heighten enjoyment dimension and self-perception theory, a state of CA is expected to positively influence PU. For example, the individual rationalizes "I am voluntarily spending a lot of time on this and enjoying it, and therefore, it must be useful" (Agarwal & Karahanna, 2000). Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H6: Cognitive absorption positively influences perceived usefulness of SNS.

CA has been recognized as a key variable of general behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985), computer technology usage (Venkatesh & Speier, 1999), and in particular evidence exists that it is the primary

determinant of individual website usage intention (Moon & Kim 2001). Moreover, Sanchez-Franco and Roldan (2005) theorized that intrinsically perceived enjoyment has been identified as an important intrinsic-motivational factor in web acceptance and usage. That is, the intrinsically motivating state of CA associated by individuals with a particular act thus could significantly impact individual attitudes and BI reward to the website. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H7: Cognitive absorption positively influences behavioral intention to use SNS.

2-3. Technology Utility

Technology utility (TU) is standalone utility which is not arising from the network externality effect, and it is not related to the number of users (Farrell & Saloner, 1986; Kauffman et al., 2000; Saloner & Shepard, 1995). For example, a product with numerous users may be replaced by a new product because of its better technology utility. The new product is often successful because of its unique design feature or function. Users may consider that SNS especially useful if it provides functions that are not provided by other computer-mediated communication, such as friend management, profile management, video, audio and photo sharing, entertaining game and blogging. This kind of functions may increase intention to use. Through the increase of customers' perceived technology valuation, technology utility can influence user perceptions of usefulness and intention to use (Kauffman et al., 2000). When users need to make a decision about which SNS software to use, they would consider about the technology utility which SNS provide them. Thus, PU and BI of SNS increase with TU. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H8: Technology utility positively influences perceived usefulness of SNS.

H9: Technology utility positively influences behavioral intention to use SNS.

The TU of SNS may influence users' perception towards CA. TU is that the function or contents which new technology provides can improve the user's benefit. Novak, Hoffman, and Yung (2000) indicated that speed of interaction, one characteristic of interactivity, corresponds to increases in focus of attention, time distortion, and flow experience. Ghose and Dou (1998) also noted that the higher the interactivity level of a webpage, the more attractive it is. Therefore, interactivity is expected to have a positive influence on the web user's perception of flow experience. Furthermore, the attractiveness of a website reflects the representation's richness and quality. It was expected that among many other factors that contribute to the attractiveness of a website, people's experience with similar websites in general might affect their impression and flow experience. Skadberg and Kimmerl (2004) tried to construct a flow model in the context of browsing a website through design, performance, experience, and contents. Furthermore, they argued attractiveness and speed are the

factors which influence flow experience like time distortion and enjoyment. While SNS has implemented a wide variety of technological functions including user-customized, audio-visual support, multi-media contents and multiple communication mechanisms for the users, these functions will create enjoyable to the users. As the user perceived enjoyment with the new technology may also influence users' flow experience. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H10: Technology utility of SNS positively influences cognitive absorption.

2-4. Network Externality: Perceived Number of Users

Network externalities can be positive or negative. Positive network externality may occur when the large size of network users increased the value of the network for the users. For instance, a large network of e-mail users generates greater benefits for the other e-mail users by providing them with a large user group with which they can communicate by e-mail and it would make e-mail usage easier and more convenient. On the contrary, negative network externality may also occur when the large size of network users reduces the value of the network for the users (Liebowitz & Margolis, 1995). For example, a large number of users log into the shared network will slow down the network and create a disincentive for all users. With few exceptions, most of the IT products and services are characterized by positive rather than negative externalities (Lin & Bhattacharjee, 2008). So this study focuses on positive externalities. Network externality refers that benefits to consumers depend on the number of other consumers who use similar or compatible products (Katz & Shapiro, 1985). Katz and Shapiro (1985) devised the idea of network externalities to explain the phenomenon that the number of users may determine product utility in certain situations. For example, the value of the internet increases as it allows more people to communicate and exchange information with other participants; its popularity, in turn, attracts more users to that technology.

Katz and Shapiro (1985) described two types of network externalities: direct and indirect. Direct network externalities are based on the number of participants in a given network. Several studies which have examined the effects of direct network externality on the adoption of information technology from the aspect of "critical mass" have referred to the level of importance of a consumer's perception of technology adoption by other consumers (Luo & Strong, 2003; Hsu & Lu, 2004). In other words, if users perceive that the numbers of their classmates, friends or colleagues who are using the SNS increased, they would also try to use the system. However, to take account of critical mass would simplify the indirect effects of network externality on the adoption intentions. Consumers' perceptions of the eventual development of related products and services, along with their perceptions of increasing numbers of others supporting that technology would add value to the technology, which would eventually lead to further increases in the number of others adopting its use (Nault & Dexter, 1994; Wang & Seidmann, 1995). In other words, whether direct or indirect network

externalities would ultimately affect the number of users.

As described previously, this study uses the aspect of perceived number of users (PNOU) to examine the effects of network externality on the adoption of information technology. Essentially, network externalities occurred when the users perceived benefit from using a product or services increasing with the perceived number of users. SNS is one of the communication products, and it would be affected by network externalities, because users could share information or video, communicate or play on-line games with more other users. Moreover, the more people use SNS, the more utility which users derive from the technology. Therefore, the usefulness of SNS may be determined by the network effect which base on the number of users. The following hypothesis is formulated:

H11: The perceived number of SNS users positively influence perceived usefulness of SNS.

When SNS adopters perceive a large number of SNS users, they may result from the system is not difficult to learn. Because of the perception of large number of users and not difficult to use, they would take much time to learn about a specific program's features and functionalities, to get hands-on experience or to ask for demonstrations from other SNS users. When the adopters spent more time on exchanging information, SNS adopters will accept the attitude that SNS is not difficult to learn or use, and they would likely share that perception with other potential users (Lou et al., 2000). SNS has a variety of functions like communication mechanisms, multi-media contents, and entertaining on-line games which offer users to contact and play games with others friends. As users perceived the number of SNS users increasing, it could induce the sense of enjoyment and immersion due to sharing information, communicating, blogging or playing entertaining games with a lot of friends and colleagues. In other words, increasing perceived number of SNS users would allow other users to interact with more SNS users, which may have an influence for users to spend more time on SNS and increase the level of CA. Thus, we established the following hypotheses:

H12: Perceived number of SNS users positively influences perceived ease of use.

H13: Perceived number of SNS users positively influences cognitive absorption.

Lou et al. (2000) argued that information system acceptance needs the participation of numerous individuals to create a sense of collective action. Most of the users are not willing to use technology in small numbers. Pae and Hyun (2002) proved that network externality is positively associated with technology adoption. Chakravarty (2003) found that over 80 percent of technology buyers anticipate that other buyers will buy the same technology in the future, although it may be more expensive than other technology. Lange et al. (2001) also support the conception that network

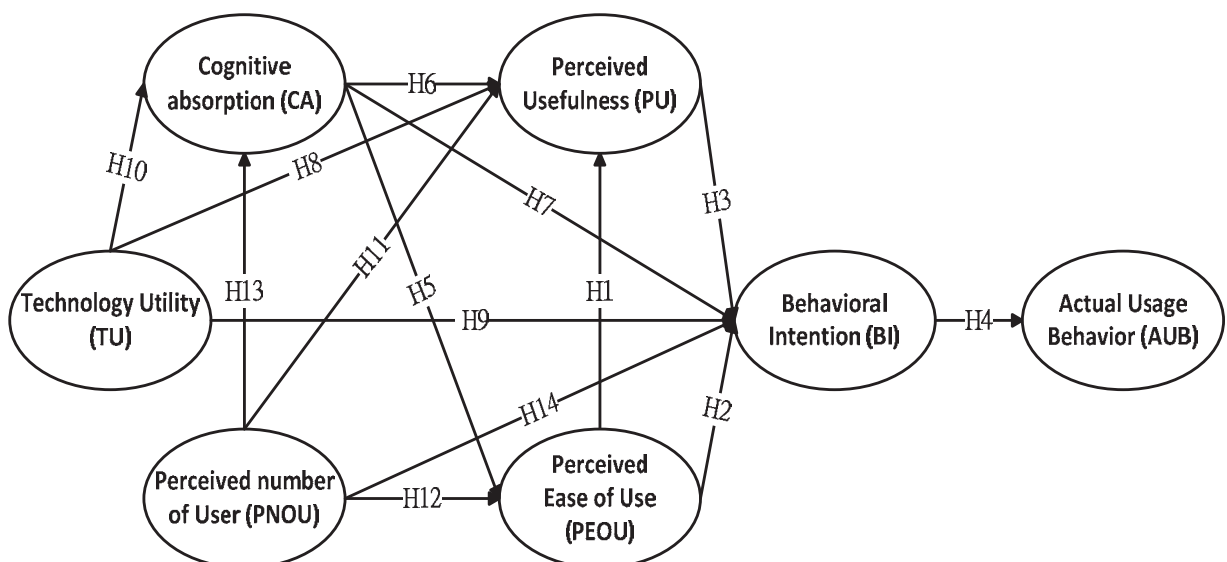
externalities would affect behavioral intention and adoption behavior. According to the literature, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H14: The perceived number of SNS users positively influences behavioral intention to use SNS.

2-5. National Culture

Culture has been defined as “Mental concepts influencing relationships with other people, the environment and the concept of time” (Kralisch & Berendt, 2004). Another definition of culture is concerned with differences such as “Educational background, beliefs, art, morals, customs, laws, economic and political framework, normally typified by country, etc.” (Pheng & Yuquan, 2002). Based on the previous research, culture is imperative for understanding consumer’s behavior because it is one of the most relevant aspects of a user’s personal context (Kralisch & Berendt, 2004). Moreover, the importance of cultural influence on decision-making has been discussed extensively in the literature (Malhotra & McCort, 2001). These studies indicated that culture plays an important role in individual decision-making, attitudes and other cognitive process. To understand the cultural values for explaining users’ behavior becomes increasingly important. Therefore, this study would measure the user adoption behavior of social network sites in different countries.

This study uses TAM as the starting point incorporates with cognitive absorption and network externality theory which encompass perceived number of users. The relationships of the extended TAM are proposed below (Figure 1).



[Figure 1: Research Framework]

3. Research Methodology

3-1. Overview

This study examines the relationships between TAM, cognitive absorption and network externality to predict the behavior intention and actual usage behavior of SNS in different country. After reviewing all relevant concepts of literatures, the purpose of this section is to emphasize the research methodology for verifying the research framework and hypotheses in this study. This section is organized in measures, sampling, data collection, pre-test, and data analysis methodology.

3-2. Measures

Based on previous studies, the survey questionnaire is developed with appropriate modifications to measure research framework. PEOU and PU attributes are measured by modified multiple-item perceptual scales from Davis (1989) and Viswanath and Davis (2000). Three questions of BI are adopted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). The study asked respondent to assess BI through the questions which are whether they want to registered or use the SNS. And AUB is assessed by two questions which inquired whether respondents use the SNS frequently.

Besides, this survey asked respondent to assess TU through the questions which are whether the SNS is useful, wonderful and valuable technology from the technical viewpoint. And the questions about PNOU are composed to indicate how many people use the SNS and influence respondents to use it.

CA scale is adopted from original work of Agarwal and Karahanna (2000) and further modified by Shang and Chen (2005). Fourteen items are used to measure CA by temporal dissociation, focus immersion, heightened enjoyment, control, and curiosity. Two questions capture temporal dissociation, and three questions measure focused immersion about concentration level of SNS usage. Four items measure enjoyment and the items are whether the respondents use the SNS fell interesting or boring. Finally, two items measure the variable of control and three items measure curiosity.

For consistency, all responses are measured using a Likert-type scale, with 1 ="strongly disagree," 4 = "neutral," and 7 = "strongly agree." The questionnaire also collects demographic data including gender, age and country of birth.

The questionnaire was developed in English modified from the literature, and then translated into Chinese version. To determine whether the translation process change the content of the measurement items, the Chinese questionnaire is back translated into English by a different translator to check the accuracy of the terminology used (Sinaiko & Triandis, 1973). The high degree of correspondence between the original and translated English versions confirmed that the translation process had not introduced language bias into the questionnaire design. A few minor disagreements which result from the use of some Chinese terms that translated from English

literature and discussion continued revision until a consensus is achieved.

3-3. Sampling and Data Collection

The respondents are sampled from a population of volunteer internet users and conduct among individuals in Taiwan and US. Specifically, the questionnaire is conducted to all the individuals who have experience of using SNS, but it does not have the restrictions on age, gender, or educational background. This procedure is employed to ensure that the sample represents a broad cross-section of the user population and to avoid sampling bias. This study uses paper-based and web-based questionnaires to collect sample data from the target population from Oct 21, 2009 to May 6, 2010. And the survey asks respondents to complete the questionnaire by answering the questions regarding SNS, such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Plurk, Bebo, or Cyworld.

3-4. Pretest

A pretest was conducted within a smaller sample including 15 Taiwanese and 15 US respondents who have experience of using SNS. A pretest was conducted to determine (1) the clarity of the questionnaire and its wording, (2) any modifications that could hinder completion of the questionnaire, and (3) the necessary time to complete the questionnaire. After reading a survey letter of consent and completing the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate any difficulties or ambiguities in it. According to responses and comments, several questions were modified and dropped.

3-5. Analysis Methodology

To test the proposed model, this study examined the hypotheses by applying the partial least squares (PLS) (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). Compared to the Linear Structural Relations (LISREL) model, PLS approach uses distribution-free assumptions (Joreskog & Wold, 1982), especially when independence of observations is not stipulated (Wold, 1985). Moreover, PLS is less rigid in variable normality and randomness, and more flexible in sample size when estimating path coefficient. As a construct combines many similar measurement variables in regression models, there is a problem about multicollinearity. Nevertheless, PLS deals with measurement errors. Some research suggested that the application of PLS has been using among IS researchers in recent years (Compeau & Higgins, 1995; Aubert et al., 1994;) because of its ability to model latent constructs under conditions of non-normality and with small sample sizes.

PLS method implies that individual item loading, Cronbach's α , composite reliability (CR), correlation and internal consistency reliabilities are examined as a test of reliability. PLS generate estimates of standardized regression coefficients for model paths, which can be used measure the relationships between latent variables (Avilio et al., 1999). The explained variance in the dependent

constructs is assessed as an indication of the overall predictive strength of the model. This study uses the Visual PLS to conduct the analysis for each country sample independently.

4. Analysis and Results

4-1. Descriptive Statistics

The survey was administered to 326 respondents and 305 (93.56%) questionnaires were accepted for data analysis. This study excluded 21 questionnaires that compose 13 respondents do not have the experience of SNS and 8 questionnaires of non-completed. The sample consisted of 146 (Taiwan) and 159 (US) valid responses. The respondents in Taiwan are male (43.2%) and female (56.8%), while in US are male (45.9%) and female (54.1%). Majority of Taiwan (89.1%) and the US (82.4%) respondents are in the age of 18–30 years old. The US has a higher percentage of respondents in the age range over 30 years old than Taiwan (Taiwan: 10.9%, US: 17.6%). Moreover, all the respondents in Taiwan and majority of the respondents in US (91.2%) use Facebook. And other frequently used SNS in both countries are MySpace and Twitter. These statistics indicate that many respondents are familiar with more than one SNS. The data show that respondents use SNS to keep in touch with their old friends and learn more about their classmates, colleagues or someone met in social occasion frequently. The profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Item	Category	Percentage	
		Taiwan	US
Gender	Male	43.2%	45.9%
	Female	56.8%	54.1%
Age	Under 20	35%	13.8%
	21~30	54.1%	68.6%
	31~40	7.5%	8.8%
	41~50	3.4%	4.4%
	51~60	0	4.4%
The Usage of SNS	Facebook	100%	91.2%
	MySpace	6.8%	22%
	Twitter	2.7%	19.5%
	Plurk	1.5%	1.3%
	Bebo	0	2.5%
	Cyworld	1.3%	2.5%
The Purpose of SNS Usage	Check out someone met socially.	20.7%	21.5%
	Learn more about classmate or colleague.	21.5%	21.4%
	Learn more about other people living near me.	16.2%	17.9%
	Keep in touch with old friends.	22.6%	24.6%
	Meet new people.	19%	14.6%

[Table 1: Sample Characteristics Comparison]

4-2. Reliability Assessment

Reliabilities of individual items are assessed by examining the factor loadings of the items on their respective constructs. The items should be higher than the acceptable level of 0.5 to indicate that significant variance was shared between each item and the construct (Hair et al., 1998). As show in Table 2 and Table 3, factor loading of all items range from 0.72 to 0.96 (Table 2) in Taiwan and the items range from 0.54 to 0.95 (Table 3) in US which exceed the acceptable level, except for the concept control and temporal dissociation and the item HE4 and FI3 in cognitive absorption. This study excludes the two items due to low reliability.

The Cronbach's α of each construct should exceed the 0.7 criteria suggested by Nunnally (1978), indicating that the measurement has good internal consistency reliability. Moreover, composite reliability (CR) is the same as construct reliability (Chin, 1998). The value of CR should exceed 0.7 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). According to Table 2 and Table 3, the Cronbach's α and CRs of each constructs overall exceed the standard level. The results indicate that the reliability of all the constructs is adequate when applying the data generated in both Taiwan and US.

Another measure of reliability is the average variance extracted (AVE) which reflects the overall amount of variance in the indicators accounted for the latent construct. Higher variance

extracted values occur when the indicators are truly representative of the latent construct. Guidelines suggest that the AVE value should exceed 0.5 for a construct (Bagozzi et al., 1991) to account for 50% or more variance of indicators. AVE value of each construct ranges from 0.55 to 0.91 in Taiwan and 0.55 to 0.87 in US, which exceed the threshold level, indicating that the measurement has good reliability.

Constructs	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Composite reliability	Average variances extracted	Cronbach's α
Technology utility	5.46	0.99	0.82~0.86	0.87	0.70	0.78
Perceived number of users	5.94	1.08	0.84~0.90	0.91	0.77	0.85
Cognitive absorption	4.77	0.85	0.72~0.83	0.91	0.55	0.89
Perceived usefulness	4.47	1.08	0.75~0.90	0.91	0.71	0.86
Perceived ease of use	5.12	1.12	0.87~0.94	0.94	0.81	0.92
Behavioral intention	5.39	1.04	0.89~0.96	0.95	0.87	0.92
Actual usage behavior	4.98	1.61	0.95~0.96	0.95	0.91	0.90

[Table 2: Reliability Assessment of Taiwan]

Constructs	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Composite reliability	Average variances extracted	Cronbach's α
Technology utility	5.58	1.10	0.85~0.92	0.91	0.77	0.85
Perceived number of users	6.12	1.08	0.86~0.89	0.91	0.77	0.85
Cognitive absorption	4.88	0.99	0.70~0.88	0.90	0.55	0.88
Perceived usefulness	4.66	1.16	0.60~0.87	0.85	0.58	0.78
Perceived ease of use	5.36	0.97	0.54~0.89	0.87	0.63	0.80
Behavioral intention	5.39	1.16	0.77~0.94	0.91	0.78	0.85
Actual usage behavior	5.15	1.72	0.91~0.95	0.93	0.87	0.85

[Table 3: Reliability Assessment of US]

4-3. Discriminate and Convergent Validity Assessment

The study performed the test for discriminate validity provide by Fornell and Larcker (1981). This test suggests that a scale possesses discriminate validity if the square root of AVE is higher than the corresponding correlations among the latent variables. As shown in Table 4 and Table 5, the data

indicate a clear discriminant validity for all constructs in Taiwan and US.

Constructs	TU	PNOU	CA	PU	PEOU	BI	AUB
Technology utility	(0.837)						
Perceived number of users	0.460***	(0.877)					
Cognitive absorption	0.505***	0.146**	(0.714)				
Perceived usefulness	0.503***	0.070*	0.542***	(0.843)			
Perceived ease of use	0.250***	0.215***	0.363***	0.429***	(0.900)		
Behavioral intention	0.448***	0.339***	0.509***	0.603***	0.552***	(0.933)	
Actual usage behavior	0.322***	0.249***	0.316***	0.410***	0.425***	0.591***	(0.949)

Note: The correlation of latent variables is reported on the off-diagonals.

AVE square roots are reported on the diagonal. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

[Table 4: Correlation between Latent Variables of Taiwan]

The study also performed the test for convergent validity. Table 2 and Table 3 show the analysis results. The composite reliabilities were calculated using procedures suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), and the composite reliabilities for the seven constructs range from 0.87 to 0.95 in Taiwan and 0.85 to 0.93 in US. All values exceed 0.7, the acceptable level suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988). Average variance values extracted from each construct (ranging from 0.55 to 0.91 in Taiwan and 0.55 to 0.87 in US) also exceed the level (0.5) suggested by Bagozzi et al. (1991). All item loadings ranging from 0.72 to 0.96 in Taiwan and 0.54 to 0.95 in US. The data are significant at the five-percent significance level (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The data indicate a clear convergent validity for all constructs in Taiwan and US.

Constructs	TU	PNOU	CA	PU	PEOU	BI	AUB
Technology utility	(0.877)						
Perceived number of users	0.460***	(0.877)					
Cognitive absorption	0.537***	0.294***	(0.721)				
Perceived usefulness	0.348***	0.064*	0.559***	(0.762)			
Perceived ease of use	0.358***	0.264***	0.503***	0.574***	(0.794)		
Behavioral intention	0.424***	0.295***	0.518***	0.512***	0.420***	(0.883)	
Actual usage behavior	0.234**	0.300***	0.670***	0.533***	0.420**	0.494***	(0.933)

Note: The correlation of latent variables is reported on the off-diagonals.

AVE square roots are reported on the diagonal. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

[Table 5: Correlation between Latent Variables of US]

4-4. Structural Model Assessment

To test the basic proposition of extended TAM, we calculated path coefficients of each hypothesis using PLS approach for each country. The estimated path effects are given along with their degree of significance. A bootstrapping procedure is used to assess the level of significance of the paths computed by PLS. However, the aim of this testing was twofold; first, to check whether TAM can successfully explain behavioral intention and usage on SNS; secondly, to test whether this theory has cross-cultural validity across the two cultures used in our study. The analysis results for Taiwan and US support the role of the extend TAM as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

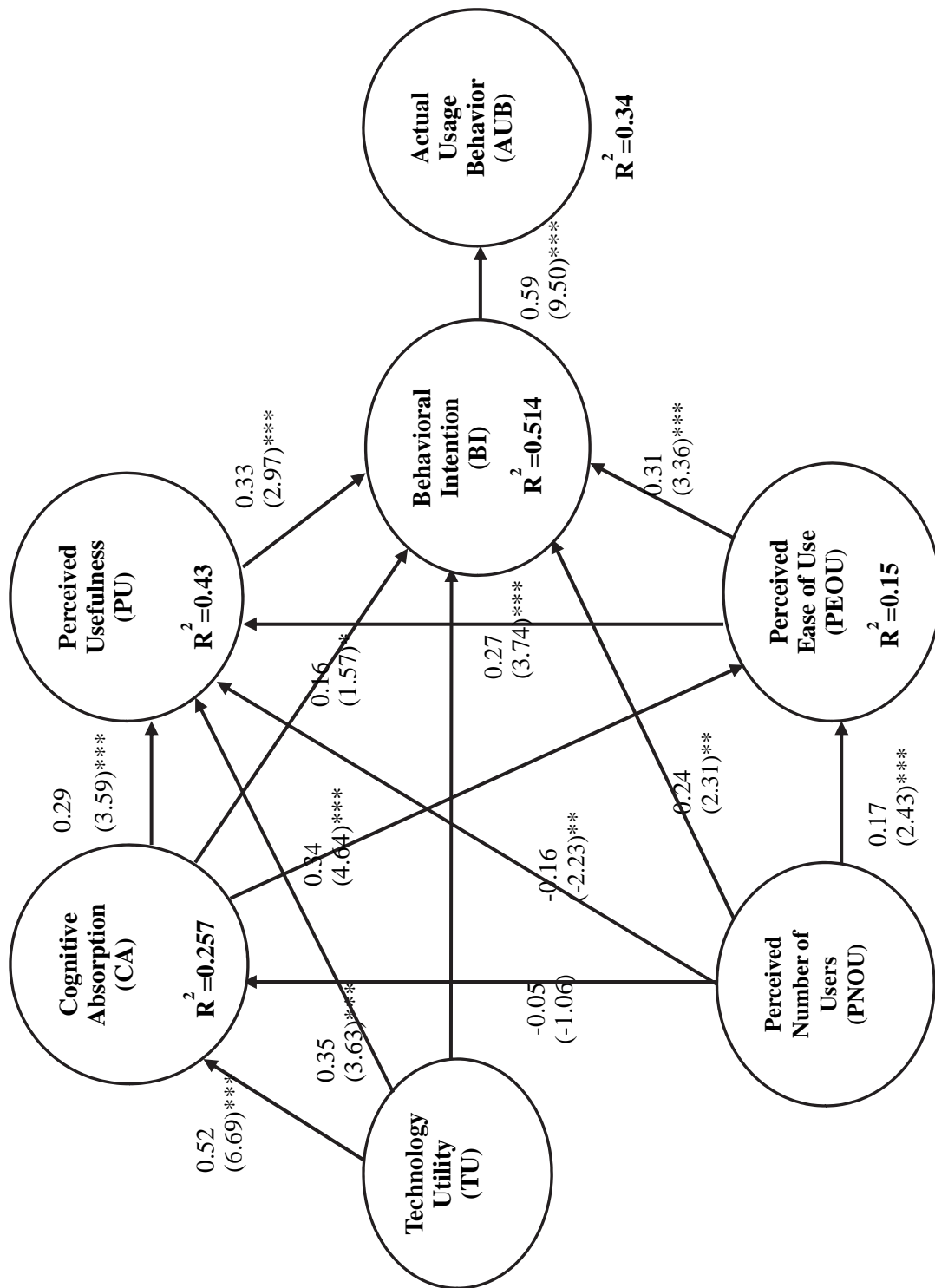
The path coefficient analysis shows that the structure of relationships hypothesized in this study. H1 concerning the impact of PEOU on PU toward SNS shows a positive relationship for the overall sample. For Taiwanese ($\beta=0.27$, $p < 0.01$) and US ($\beta=0.41$, $p < 0.01$) samples, the results show significant path coefficients in a positive direction. Thus, H1 is supported. H2 posits that PEOU would have a positive effect on BI. In fact, the coefficient was indeed significant for Taiwan ($\beta=0.31$, $p < 0.01$), but not in the US. However, H3 is strongly supported in Taiwan. PU also shows a positive impact on BI toward SNS, for Taiwanese ($\beta=0.33$, $p < 0.01$) and US ($\beta=0.04$, $p < 0.01$) samples. Thus, H3 is supported. Further, H4 posits that BI would have a positive effect in AUB. For Taiwanese ($\beta=0.59$, $p < 0.01$) and US ($\beta=0.49$, $p < 0.01$) samples. Both of their coefficients are

significant, validating H4.

The results show that CA on SNS is an important determinant of PEOU, PU and BI toward SNS. For Taiwanese users CA is important in determining their beliefs on PEOU ($\beta=0.34$, $p < 0.01$) and PU ($\beta=0.29$, $p < 0.01$). And for US users CA is also an important factor in determining their beliefs on PEOU ($\beta=0.47$, $p < 0.01$) and PU ($\beta=0.36$, $p < 0.01$). Overall, the results seem to support both H5 and H6. Similarly, CA also positively impacts BI, but in case of the Taiwanese ($\beta=0.16$, $p < 0.1$) this relationship is weaker than in US samples ($\beta=0.20$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, H7 is partial significant in the case of Taiwan, but it has a significant positive effect in the US.

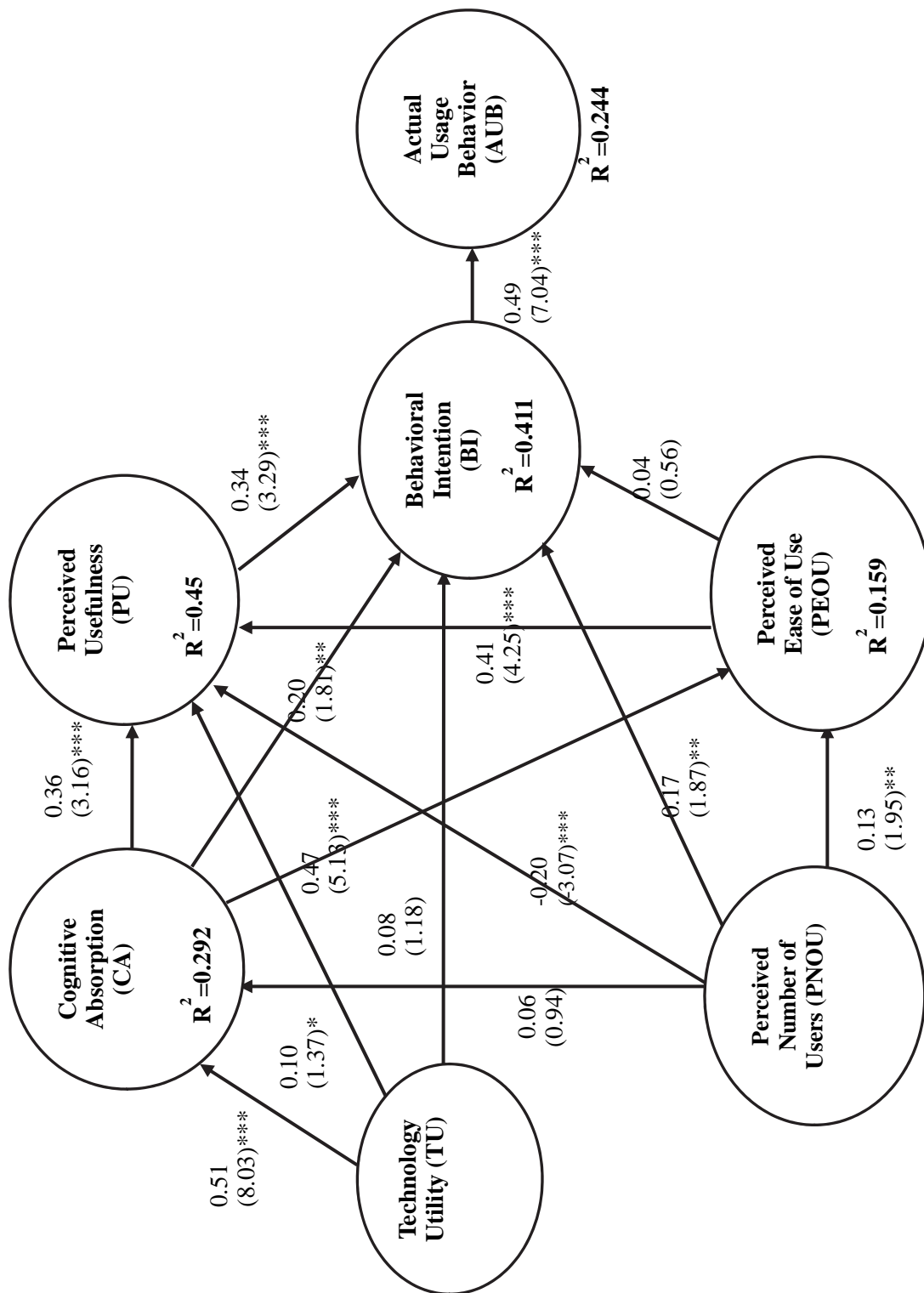
H8 posits that TU would have a positive effect on PU, but in case of US samples ($\beta=0.10$, $p < 0.1$), this relationship is strongly supported in the case of Taiwanese ($\beta=0.34$, $p < 0.01$). In fact, the coefficient was indeed significant in Taiwan but partial significant in the US. However, H8 is strongly supported in Taiwan. H9 posits that TU have positive relationships to BI. However, the results show that TU does not have significant path coefficients on intentions in Taiwan and US. Therefore, H9 is not supported. Moreover, the results show that TU has a significant direct effect on CA in Taiwanese ($\beta=0.52$, $p < 0.01$) and US ($\beta=0.51$, $p < 0.01$) samples. Thus, H10 is strongly supported.

The results also show that PNOU toward SNS is an important factor in this study. H11 posits that PNOU have positive relationships to PU. However, the results show that PNOU have negative significant path coefficients on PU in Taiwanese ($\beta=-0.16$, $p < 0.05$) and US ($\beta=-3.07$, $p < 0.01$) samples which do not support H11. PNOU also shows a positive impact on PEOU toward SNS, for Taiwanese ($\beta=0.17$, $p < 0.01$) and US ($\beta=0.13$, $p < 0.05$) samples. Thus, H12 is supported. And the results show that there do not have relationship between PNOU and CA. Therefore, H13 is not supported. Finally, H14 posits that PNOU have positive relationships to BI. However, the results show that PNOU have a significant effect on BI in Taiwanese samples ($\beta=0.24$, $p < 0.05$) and US samples ($\beta=0.17$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, H14 is supported. The summary of hypothesis tests is shown in Table 6.



*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

[Figure 2: PLS Analysis Result of Taiwan]



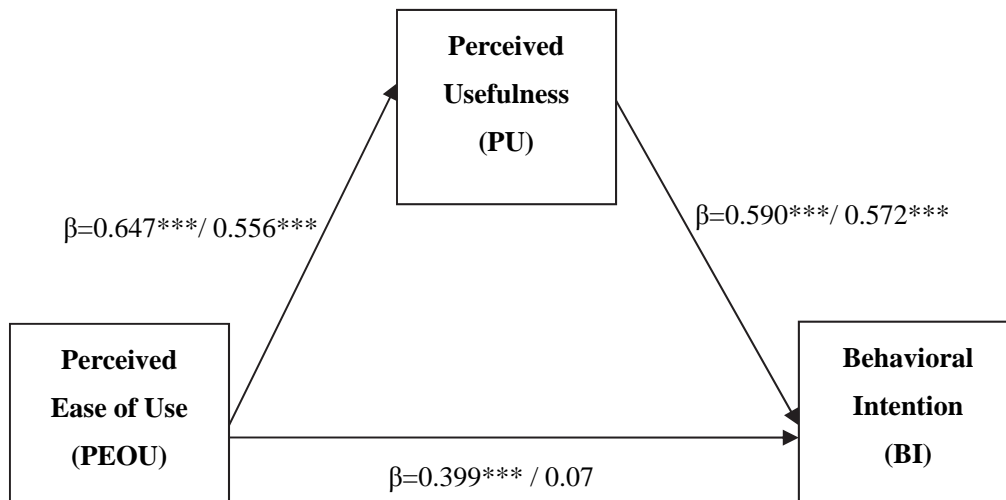
*P<0.1; **P<0.05; ***P<0.01

[Figure 3: PLS Analysis Result of US]

Latent Variable	Taiwan	US
H1: PEOU→PU	0.27(3.74)***	0.41(4.25)***
H2: PEOU→BI	0.31(3.36)***	0.04(0.56)
H3: PU→BI	0.33(2.97)***	0.34(3.29)***
H4: BI→AUB	0.59(9.50)***	0.49(7.04)***
H5: CA→PEOU	0.34(4.64)***	0.47(5.13)***
H6: CA→PU	0.29(3.59)***	0.36(3.16)***
H7: CA→BI	0.16(1.57)*	0.20(1.81)**
H8: TU→PU	0.35(3.63)***	0.10(1.37)*
H9: TU→BI	0.09(1.21)	0.08(1.18)
H10: TU→CA	0.52(6.69)***	0.51(8.03)***
H11: PNOU→PU	-0.16(-2.23)**	-0.20(-3.07)***
H12: PNOU→PEOU	0.17(2.43)***	0.13(1.95)**
H13: PNOU→CA	-0.05(-1.06)	0.06(0.94)
H14: PNOU→BI	0.24(2.31)**	0.18(1.87)**

[Table 6: Summary of Hypotheses Tests]

This study tested the mediated effect of PU between PEOU and BI. The first requirement is that PEOU accounts for variability in the dependent variable (PU). This relationship ($\beta=0.647$, $p<0.01$) is significant and in the expected direction; that is, PU of SNS is significantly higher in PEOU toward SNS. The second requirement is to examine the effect of PU on BI, and the result reveals that the significant direct effect of PU toward BI ($\beta=0.590$, $p<0.01$). Then, the third requirement is that PEOU accounts for variability in BI. This relationship ($\beta=0.399$, $p<0.01$) is also significant and in the expected direction which indicates PEOU is significantly higher in BI toward SNS. Finally, this study uses the three factors to examine the path coefficient for the mediated effect. According to the results, the path coefficient between PEOU and BI is higher in non-mediated model ($\beta=0.399$) than in mediated model ($\beta=0.07$). The results show in Figure 4. Thus, the result confirms that PU mediates the most effect of PEOU toward BI, which is an important predictor toward BI in US.



[Figure 4: The Mediated Effect of PU between PEOU and BI]

Moreover, TU affects CA which explains 25.7% of data variance in Taiwan and explains 29.2% of data variance in US, showing that the factor enhances the behavior of CA. And TU, CA and PEOU also affect PU which the three variables explain 43.8% of variance in Taiwan and 45.7% of variance in US. The results show that the three factors are important determinant to PU. CA and PNOU affect PEOU which explain 15.9% of variance in Taiwan and US. Finally, this model explains 51.4% variance of BI and 34.9% variance of AUB in Taiwan. And it also explains 41.1% variance of BI and 24.4% variance of AUB in US. Moreover, this study examines the effect of five factors on AUB including TU, CA, PNOU, PEOU and PU. The results show that the variance of BI increases to 56.7% in US, but has little additional effect on BI (37.8%) in Taiwan. The results indicate the model in this study has good predictive power to BI and AUB of SNS. To summarize, based on the analysis it is clear that all the factors are directly or indirectly influence BI and further affect AUB toward SNS in Taiwan and US.

5. Conclusion

5-1. Conclusion and Discussion

Previous research have emphasized that TAM needs to be extended to different contexts and be validated in different cultures to enhance its generalization (Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Straub et al., 1997). This study extends TAM with CA and network externality to examine whether the research framework would validly measure the user BI and AUB of SNS in two different countries. The results of the empirical analysis provide a number of insights and suggestions.

The PLS results reveal that the adoption of SNS can be predicted by extended TAM in Taiwan ($R^2=51.4\%$) and in US ($R^2=41.1\%$). Thus, the study shows a strong support for the applicability of extend TAM in SNS adoption in Taiwan and US. Consistent with prior research, PU and PEOU have

significant direct effect on BI, and the total effect of PU is greater than that of PEOU in Taiwan. Contrary to the result of Taiwan, PEOU has no direct effect on BI in US. This study further uses PLS to measure the mediating effect; the results show that PU has a strong mediating effect between PEOU and BI in US. Previous study about technology acceptance studies indicate that this linkage is situational and not always significant (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Moreover, this study examined CA acts as an important antecedent of user beliefs and SNS usage intentions. The results indicate the significant influences of CA on BI through PU and PEOU of SNS in Taiwan and US. Consistent with the hypotheses, users with a higher CA experience in the SNS are likely to have more positive usefulness and ease of use beliefs. This finding supports previous research by Saade and Bahli (2005), and Wakefield and Whitten (2006). Moreover, this study extends the generalization of such research to the SNS. While people are in absorbed experience with SNS, this research finds that users generally believe interaction with SNS is more useful and effortless and users intend to use it more frequently. The findings of this study prove the importance of CA as an intrinsic motivator of user acceptance of the social network sites.

TU has significant direct effect on PU in Taiwan and US. This results support the suggestion by Kauffman et al. (2000) that customers' perceived technology valuation and TU can influence PU and intention to use. However TU is more important for Taiwanese ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$) than US users ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.1$) in determining PU. From a technology viewpoint, the functions or contents which SNS provides may not make the US users feel useful and novel, due to the rapid development of technology in US. Moreover, TU has direct effect on CA in both countries. The result also supports the suggestion by previous study which identifies the interactivity level of a web page (Ghose & Dou, 1998), the attractiveness of a web site contents (Skadberg & Kimmerl, 2004) and perceived enjoyment from the web site would influence users' flow experience. TU has no direct impact on BI, but it has indirect effect on BI through CA and PU. Because not all technology functions are valuable to the users, these functions which SNS provides should make the users feel usefulness and could enhance the level of CA. Through the increase of valuation, TU can influence user perceptions of usefulness and intention to use. Therefore, TU would affect individual adoption through PU and CA.

This extended TAM shows that the factor of PNOU exist direct effect and indirect effect on BI through PEOU. Furthermore, the significantly negative path coefficient between PNOU and PU is interesting, since the previous study shows a positive relationship. The reason is maybe that more users logging into a share network such as SNS would slow down the network or crash the system creating a disincentive for all users. Because of the bad experience of system overloaded, it would make the user's PU decrease. It seems that PNOU ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$) is more important in determining SNS users' BI for Taiwanese users than US ones ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$). Hofstede's (1991) identified that Taiwanese are collectivist and American are individualist, and such culture difference

maybe makes PNOU different effect in two countries. Individualists are more objective than affective (Hofstede, 2001); the members of an individual society, such as the U.S., places more value in individual freedom and decision-making for BI than others' opinions. Therefore, PNOU is more important in determining SNS users' BI in Taiwan.

Overall, this study offers strong support for the extended TAM with CA and network externality in predicting user's BI and AUB of SNS. And the results also show the differences in predicting the user intention in cross-cultural country.

5-2. Practical Implication

SNS is recent popular computer-mediated communication technology among Internet users and becomes an international phenomenon. This large market provides great potential profit for e-commerce enterprises. However, many of these products are not well accepted by Internet users and they only have small market shares. The SNS companies are eager to know what factors determine acceptance of the users on SNS between different countries.

This study makes some contributions. First, this study contributes an understanding of the drivers of SNS in cross-national countries. A main contribution is the specification, justification, and empirical validation of a set of interrelationships between important factors (beliefs, CA and network externality) that tend to be associated with BI and AUB of SNS. Moreover, this study provides strong support for the extend TAM in explaining the adoption of SNS in Taiwan ($R^2=51.4\%$) and US ($R^2=41.1\%$). This study finds that besides the two factors (PU and PEOU) of TAM, CA and network externality are also important factors for SNS users. In other words, the users of SNS are concerned about both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. They not only expect SNS is useful and easy to use, but also want to have a fun and enjoy absorbed experience. This study demonstrated that the importance of individual intentions tended to need other variables: CA and network externality. Moreover, these factors on the adoption of other new technology may also be affected, they should be taken seriously.

Second, the SNS company managers should be aware of the importance of different drivers of SNS in cross-national countries. This study finds that the different culture between the samples would affect user adoption behavior. For example, the effect of network externality on BI has a relatively larger effect in Taiwan than US. PNOU and invitation from familiar people to use the SNS to share information, videos or play entertainment on-line games would be a strong effect in Taiwanese. Therefore, managers should strive to attract users affect others potential users to use SNS in Taiwan. Moreover, through word-of-mouth communication or mass advertisements, managers can accelerate network effects to achieve a perception of critical mass. The more SNS users, the more user-generated experience it is likely to exchange and thus the more users would be attracted. Furthermore, more users logging into a share network such as SNS would slow down the network or

crash the system creating a disincentive for users, which would affect the PU of users. Thus, the bandwidth of the infrastructure that delivers the interactivity must be taken into consideration to ensure that access is not slowed down by the increased number of users.

Finally, another antecedent factor is CA, and the factor is important in the two countries. Significant relationship exists between CA and PU, PEOU and BI in Taiwan and US. Hence, to generate the experiences of CA, SNS should provide immediate feedback mechanisms to gather information on user desires, satisfaction, and respond to their questions immediately. Meanwhile, website designers can increase the level of CA by improving website navigation, maximizing both interactivity and user control of websites, providing some interesting on-line games and adding some new functions that are useful to users and not provided by other system. The designers should keep users in an absorbed state to improve their products to attract and acquire users. In other words, developers should offer users a powerful communication system and add rich entertainment functions to their products, which can improve the experiences of CA and positive attitudes which will promote their acceptance of SNS.

The results of our study provide several implications to researchers and practitioners. For researchers, this study contributes to a theoretical understanding of the factors that promote the adoption of SNS. And the cross-cultural differences as an important influence factor for examine the adoption of worldwide communication system. Thus, the marketers would have to consider different marketing strategies when planning marketing strategies of a technology for different countries.

5-3. Limitations and Future Research

Our research has the following limitations. First, the explained variance of BI was about 51% and 41%. This demonstrates that other factors excluded in the model had effects on the variables. Future research should aim to retain and enhance the predictive power of the proposed model by eliminating unnecessary variables. For example, trust could also be added to the model as another variable. Second, small sample size is also another limitation. With only 146 Taiwan and 159 US participants it is possible that this small sample could be responsible for some of the non-significant relationships observed. However, this does not detract from the significant relationships that were found. Third, there are many young people (under 30 years old) in our sample, because we use convenience sampling, which may limit generalization of the findings in this study and exist some biases in our research. Future research could explore the difference between different age groups about the adoption of new technology. There could be different findings between Taiwan and US. Finally, the cross-cultural difference is an important influence factor for examine the adoption of worldwide communication system. This study does not actually add the variable in our research model to examine the effect. Future research can add the variable in the model to examine the cultural moderating effects on the adoption of new technology.

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2012 年度次世代研究「A Study on the Techno-Social History of Media Infrastructures」(研究代表：Tomohisa Hirata) による成果である。

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