

## Switching between social media: The role of motivation and cost

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**Abstract.** Web sites of social media have increasingly gained popularity. Internet users can perform social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) and social contact on these websites and switch between them to satisfy their needs. The present study investigates the new switching phenomenon, from blogs to social network sites, on the Internet. Based on motivation theory and switching cost, we propose a research model to examine several factors that affect bloggers' intention to switch to social networking sites. The results suggest that relative usefulness, effectiveness of expression and relative playfulness are positive factors to motivate bloggers' switching and switching cost is negative factor to inhibit switching intention. Furthermore, switching cost has the moderating effects to weaken the positive influences of effectiveness of expression and relative playfulness on switching intention. The results of this study provide valuable implications to academics and practitioners.

**Keywords:** social media, switching intention, motivation theory, switching cost

### 1. Introduction

Recently, social media websites are substantially popular on the Internet. Lots of Internet-based applications that base on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 allow Internet users to create and exchange various content, such as blogs and social network sites (SNS) [1]. People could thus share emotion, experience, expertise or thoughts on the Internet and make friends through social media websites. From the perspective of self-presentation and social contact, there are several different types of social media websites providing the similar services (e.g., blogs and SNS). Because the overlap of some functions across social media websites, it is not uncommon to find users' switching behavior between these websites [2]. Except for non-profit organization (e.g., Wikipedia), most social media websites rely on users' payment and advertising revenue. Therefore, it is important to retain the existing users and attract new ones. Since the cost to acquire a new customer is five times greater than hold an existing one, to retain existing users becomes a critical issue for managers of social media websites.

Bases on the practical reports and news [3, 4], young adults seem to prefer SNS rather than blogs. This might be a new Internet-based switching phenomenon that has not been well investigated. Thus, in the present study, we would focus on the switching behavior from blogs to the most famous SNS, Facebook. Furthermore, the issue of customer switching behaviour is more explored in the field of marketing than IS. The literature in relationship marketing suggest that there are positive and negative factors to affect customer switching intention [5]. Thus, we would take into account positive and negative influences for the issue of switching in the present study. In the following sections, we review the literature related to motivation and cost. We then present our research model and hypotheses and follow with the analysis of data. We conclude the paper with a discussion of our findings and implications for academics and practitioners.

### 2. Literature review and hypotheses development

In the present study, we specifically investigate the factors that influence bloggers' intention to switch to SNS. The research model and hypotheses (see Figure 1) are built upon literature related to motivation theory and switching cost.

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## 2.1. Motivation theory

Motivation has been confirmed as a key determinant of general behaviour [6]. Two kinds of motivation – extrinsic and intrinsic – have been defined and examined across various contexts and studies, including IS field. Extrinsic motivation focuses on the goal-driven reasons that are something apart from its own sake to commit an action, such as economic rewards or the performance of improvement [7]. In the IS literature, perceived usefulness, is a typical construct of extrinsic motivation [8]. Davis [9] defined usefulness as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance.” Numerous studies showed that user’s perceived usefulness of a system would have greatly and positively influences on the adoption of information technology (e.g., [10]). One of the important functions for blogs and SNS is to build and maintain relationships with people. If SNS allows users to be more effective to reach out toward one another than blogs, they will perceive more usefulness from SNS and prefer to use it. Thus, we proposal the following hypothesis

*H1: Relative usefulness of SNS is positively related to bloggers' switching intention to SNS.*

Moreover, another important users’ purpose for blogs and SNS is self-presentation or self-disclosure [1]. If visitors can identify and access easily and quickly the information needed on a website, the expression function of this website is satisfactory. Jiang & Benbasat [11] found that diagnosticity, vividness and interactivity were important factors to affect attitude toward website and product. In the blogs and SNS context, although the target of presentation is the information related to account owner rather than product, the expression function of the website is still critical characteristic for account owner. If the expression function of SNS is good enough for account owners to effectively disclose themselves, their willingness to switch to SNS will be strengthened. Accordingly, we propose the second hypothesis.

*H2: Effectiveness of expression in SNS is positively related to bloggers' switching intention to SNS.*

On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is to do an activity for its own sake and could obtain pleasure and inherent satisfaction from this activity [7]. In IS field, the construct of playfulness has been captured as an intrinsic factor and a critically motivational determinant of system acceptance [8]. Several studies demonstrated that the degree of playfulness people experienced in using computer will influence their intention to use computers in the workplace (e.g., [12]). Since SNS is the pleasure-oriented system [10] and the relative playfulness plays a more suitable role to influence the system adoption in a hedonic context [12], we assume that relative playfulness would an important predictor for bloggers’ switching intention and proposal the following hypothesis.

*H3: Relative playfulness of SNS is positively related to bloggers' switching intention to SNS.*

## 2.2. Switching cost

Burnham, Frels, and Mahajan [13] defined that switching costs are the one-time expenses that customers associate with the process of switching from one provider to another. Switching cost is salient and evident when consumers confront the possibility of switching and includes financial, social, and psychological risks [14]. When the potential sacrifices of an activity increase, the likelihood that user engage in switching intention decreases. That is, perceived switching cost is one kind of switching barriers. In the present study, the bloggers might spend extra time and efforts to build SNS profiles and have to inform other people the switching decisions. These are all switching barriers to prevent bloggers’ switching, so we assume switching cost is a negative factor to influence bloggers’ switching intention.

*H4: Perceived switching cost of bloggers is negatively related to bloggers' switching intention to SNS.*

In addition, switching cost might be the intervening obstacles to inhibit individual’s switching behaviour even if the attraction is strong [15]. In the present study, we assume that switching cost might moderate the relationship of usefulness-intention, effectiveness of expression-intention and playfulness-intention. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed.

*H5a: Stronger perception of switching costs will weaken the association between usefulness and switching intention.*

*H5b: Stronger perception of switching costs will weaken the association between effectiveness of expression and switching intention.*

*H5c: Stronger perception of switching costs will weaken the association between playfulness and switching intention.*

### 2.3. Control Variables

According to prior literature, if users had experience about service switching, they would have more intention to switch again [15]. Furthermore, the usage of SNS is highly affected by peer influence [10]. Therefore, prior behaviors of switching and subjective norm from peers are captured as control variables in the present study.

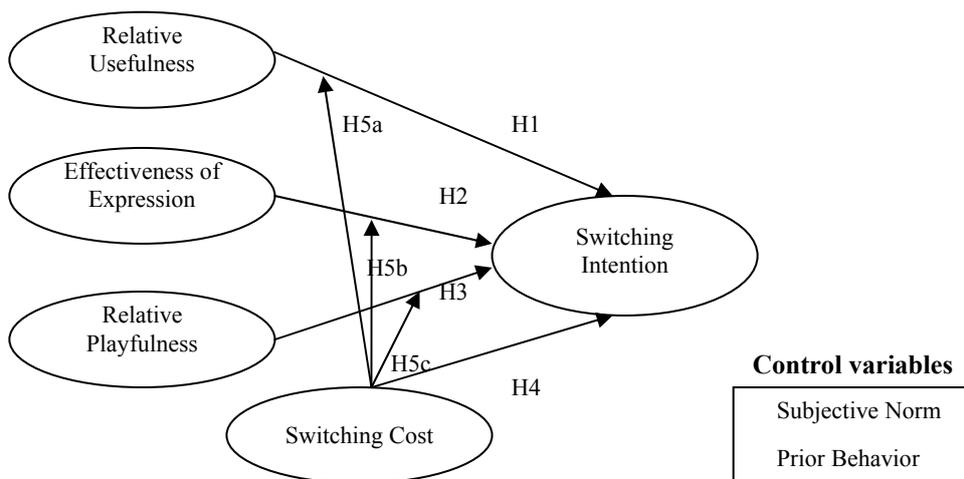


Fig. 1. Research Model

## 3. Research method

### 3.1. Instrument development

Measurement items were adapted from prior literature wherever possible [2, 10, 11, 13] and used seven-point Likert scales.

### 3.2. Data collection

We collected data via an online questionnaire that is convenient to reach bloggers and SNS users. We distributed the survey message contained the URL to this online questionnaire in several popular online forums. To increase response rate, economic rewards were given to selected participants by lottery. Finally, 325 responses were found to be complete and valid for data analysis. Among the valid respondents, 160 (49.2%) were man and 165 (50.8%) were women. 91.3% were under 30 years of age and 97.5% had at least a college degree.

## 4. Data analysis

We adopted partial least squares (PLS) using SmartPLS 2.0 [16] to analyze our research model. PLS is a component-based structural equation modeling approach that has frequently adopted technique in IS literature. We first assessed the measurement model and then the structural model.

### 4.1. Measurement model

We validated the measurement model by calculating the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. First, the results of reliability in Table 1 fall within the acceptable range (Cronbach's alphas > 0.7, composite reliability > 0.7) [17]. Second, because all indicator loadings were significant and exceeded 0.7, and average variance extracted (AVE) by each construct exceeded 0.5 (see Table 1) [18], the convergent

validity of the scales was verified. Finally, as shown in Table 2, the square root of the AVE for each construct were greater than the correlation between constructs [18], so discriminant validity was assured.

Table 1 Factor loadings and reliability

Construct	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Relative Playfulness (RP)	0.85	0.95	0.92
Relative Usefulness (RU)	0.89	0.96	0.94
Effectiveness of Expression (IE)	0.71	0.88	0.79
Switching Cost (SC)	0.61	0.86	0.79
Switching Intention (SI)	0.87	0.95	0.92

Table 2 Mean, standard deviation and correlation matrix of constructs

	Mean	STD	RP	RU	EE	SC	SI
RP	5.53	1.05	<b>0.92</b>				
RU	4.99	1.39	0.23	<b>0.94</b>			
EE	5.16	1.07	0.66	0.18	<b>0.84</b>		
SC	3.24	1.19	-0.36	-0.43	-0.33	<b>0.78</b>	
SI	5.30	1.34	0.66	0.28	0.60	-0.38	<b>0.93</b>

Diagonals represent the square root of average variance extracted (AVE).

## 4.2. Structural model

The results of the data analysis and the hypotheses testing are presented in Figure 2. Tests of significance of all paths were performed using the bootstrap resampling procedure. It can be seen that direct effects related to H1, H2, H3, H4 are all supported at the  $p < .05$  level of significance. That is, relative playfulness, relative usefulness, information expression are positively related to switching intention and switching cost is negatively related to switching intention. However, the hypotheses for moderating effects are not fully supported. The switching cost significantly moderates the effect of effectiveness of expression on switching intention and the interaction effect of switching cost by relative playfulness on switching intention is marginally significant. Thus, H5b is supported and H5c is marginally supported. However, the results suggest that switching cost is not moderator for the relationship between relative usefulness and switching cost, so H5a is not supported. Finally, our results also demonstrate that research model explains 59% variance of switching intention.

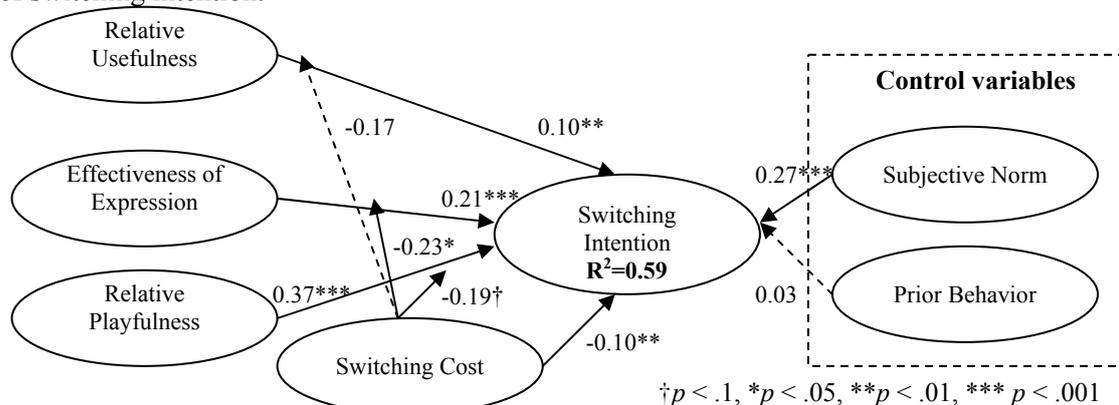


Fig. 2. Results of PLS analysis

## 5. Discussion

In this study, we proposed a research model to understand the relative impacts of extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, and switching cost. The results identify the role of motivation and cost in the issue of switching between social media websites. Relative usefulness, effectiveness of expression and relative

playfulness are the positive factors while switching cost has negative influence on switching intention. The switching cost also could moderate the relationship of effectiveness of expression-intention and playfulness-intention. That is, bloggers would stay with blogs even if there is strong attraction from SNS, because they might spend extra effort and time to setup new account on SNS and to inform their friends the switching decision.

The results are also helpful for managers of social media websites to design more effective websites to retain valuable customers and attract new customers. For blogs service providers, it is necessary develop competitive strategy to enhance the functions related to fun and usefulness to retain young bloggers. Furthermore, to increase switching cost by providing more benefits is helpful to keep bloggers to stay in blogs and mitigate the external attraction from other platforms. On the other side, SNS services had the superiority in playful attributes and effectiveness to contact with other people. SNS service providers could base on these advantages to extend market. In addition, to develop assistant tools for data import and simplify the process of account register is helpful to reduce the switching cost for users on other platforms.

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