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Switching Behavior in Social Networking Sites: Exploring The Philippine Case of Friendster vs. Facebook

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Abstract
One of key issues for online service providers due to the increased competition is “churn” or customer movement in and out of the marketplace. Although many studies were conducted to study user’s switching behavior on various online services (web browsers, blogs, etc.), only a few studies were made regarding the switching behavior of users in social networking sites (SNSs). Considering the widespread use of SNSs around the world and the sudden shift of Filipino SNS usage from Friendster to Facebook, this paper examines five possible factors that should affect the user’s intention and behavior to switch from one SNS to another. An exploratory interview was done to 15 Filipino students to create ideas for possible factors affecting SNS users and scales from previous studies were used to make the survey questionnaire. A pilot test was then conducted to 20 Filipino students and appropriate modifications on the items were made from the results. Finally, the survey was distributed online through Facebook messages and emails.

Keywords
Social Networking Site, Switching Behavior

1. Introduction
Beginning with Classmates.com, several SNSs were developed and with the booming of the Internet, it has become more than just a fad but something that has already moved into the cultural mainstream. SNSs are increasingly attracting the attention of academic and industry researchers intrigued by their affordances and reach (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Several studies were made regarding privacy and the acceptance of specific SNSs; as well as its psychological effects on its users. However, only a few studies were made with regards to switching behavior in SNSs. With the fact that there are thousands of SNSs in the Internet, why do users switch from one SNS to another? What are the factors that could affect the user’s intention to switch? How could the SNS managers help the users “stick” to their site and keep them from switching? This study will find the answers as it explores the Friendster vs. Facebook phenomenon in the Philippines.

Motivated by this unexplored area of study, interviews were done to help gather ideas of possible factors and a model was made. With satisfaction, switching cost, investment, alternative attractiveness, and social influence as the external factors, we reviewed the related literatures; created the items for the questionnaire; and conducted a pilot test followed by a large-scale online survey to gather the necessary data.

The paper is divided into sections as follows. The following section discusses the related literatures reviewed. Section 3 introduces our research model and hypotheses. Finally, the steps that we’ve taken and the measures that we used will be explained in Section 4.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Switching Behavior and Social Networking Sites
Customer switching behavior has been studied extensively by marketing researchers. Traditionally, researchers have focused on consumer switching between frequently purchased consumer products and these studies usually examine the impact of marketing practices (as cited in Ye et al., 2006). Ping’s (1993) research was one of the early studies that addressed switching behaviors between companies and it was only until recently that researchers have turned their attention to customer switching in service industries such as Internet Service Providers (Keaveney & Parthasarathy, 2001); Email Services (Kim et al., 2006); and the like.

Kim et al. (2010) differentiated SNSs from other sites as a web site that allows people to stay connected with other people in online communities. For the past few years, various studies have been made to understand the switching behavior of users in web sites (online shopping sites, blogging sites, etc.). However, it seems that only a few has touched this topic in SNSs and this has motivated us to integrate several factors of technology adoption into the context of SNSs. The shift in the Philippines has also made this topic ripe for exploration which added more meaning in pursuing this study.

2.2 The Philippine Case of Friendster vs. Facebook
This study focuses on the two most controversial SNSs in the Philippines. The blogs and news all say the same thing: Not too long ago, “Add me on Friendster!” was the likely note to end a conversation on, whether between old friends or even newly acquainted people. In fact, the Philippines has over 13 million active Friendster users, more than any other country in the world (Lapeña, 2009). However, Facebook has continued to capture the Filipinos and in September 2009 alone, the number of Facebook users in the Philippines continued to surge with over 1.3 million Filipinos registering for new accounts in the social networking site. This made the Philippines the number one country in Asia in terms of growth in Facebook users for the month (Dizon, 2009).

Boyd and Ellison’s (2007) attempts to construct a history of SNS, resulted in a timeline that highlights just how quickly these things are moving into everyday life. Friendster is one of the most popular social networking sites in Asia. It was a sensation the Philippines too until the popularity of Facebook seems unstoppable that last May 2010, a report released by Google themselves showed social networking site Facebook lording it over the Internet (Manotoc, 2010). Amidst Friendster’s “first-mover advantage”, most Filipinos have made the exodus from Friendster to Facebook. Taking advantage of this phenomenon, a research model (see Figure 1) has been developed to be tested to finally explain the cause of the users’ switching behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason of Switching</th>
<th>Number of Users (Total = 15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Server Speed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functionalities</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Interview Results
3. Research Model and Hypotheses

Using five factors that could possibly affect user switching behavior, we came up with a model (Figure 1) to determine the causes of why Filipino SNS users switch from Friendster to Facebook. Common in loyalty and post-adoption behavior studies, we now apply the first for factors in the SNS context. Social Influence has also been added due to the interview results (Table 1) wherein the participants answered that the reason for their switch was due to peer pressure; thus, making it an interesting antecedent for switching intention.

![Figure 1: Research Model](image)

Extensive research and studies have been made by marketing researchers regarding satisfaction and it has been identified as a reliable predictor to consumer switching in a variety of industries. Many IS studies have treated user satisfaction as a dependent variable that represents IS success, rather than an independent variable that influences user behavior (as cited in Ye et al., 2006). However, we believe that the level of satisfaction of the user on his current SNS, will directly influence their intention to switch. Therefore, the more the user is dissatisfied with Friendster, the more likely he is to switch to Facebook.

**H1:** User Satisfaction with the current SNS (Friendster) is negatively related to switching intention.

Burnham et al. (2003) defined switching cost as the onetime costs that customers associate with the process of switching from one provider to another. Previous researches have regarded switching cost as a moderator in the satisfaction-loyalty linkage however, contrary to this; we believe that switching costs directly affects the user’s intention to switch. With the increases in switching costs (money, time, and effort), it is also assumed that a customer’s willingness to change or switch SNSs will reduce. Thus,

**H2:** Users’ perception of switching cost is negatively related to switching intention.

Investment on the other hand, is differentiated from switching cost as it refers to the extent and importance of the resources attached to the relationship with the current Web site (as cited in Li et al., 2007). It is assumed that if the user invested a lot of time, effort, and
pictures uploaded on his Friendster account then it would influence his decision not to switch to Facebook; knowing that he would lose all he invested once he decides to switch.

**H3: Users’ investment is negatively related to switching intention.**

Alternative attractiveness is nothing but the good features of the alternative SNS (Facebook). These features include games, applications, the chatting system, and other functionalities. Keaveney (1995) identified that attraction by competitors is one of the eight reasons that will drive customers to switch services. Therefore, if the user finds the features in Facebook more attractive and better than Friendster’s, then the most likely that he will switch to Facebook.

**H4: Alternative Attractiveness of the competing product (Facebook) is positively related to switching intention.**

In Lu et al’s (2005) study, social influence refers to perceived pressures from social networks to make or not to make a certain behavioral decision. Simply put, if the user switched SNSs because of his friends and special others’ influence, then it is logical to support H5.

**H5: Social Influence is positively related to switching intention.**

Switching intention in this study is operationalized as the willingness of the user to switch SNSs. As a general rule, the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance (Ajzen, 1991). Thus,

**H6: Users’ switching intention is positively related to the actual behavior of the users to switch.**

**4. Research Methodology**

The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that cause the switching behavior of users in SNSs. An exploratory interview, comprised of a single open-ended question (What caused you to switch to Facebook?), was conducted to 15 Filipino students who once had a Friendster account and is now maintaining a Facebook account. The results of the interview and previous papers gave way to ideas in creating the research model. A pilot test was then distributed to 20 participants wherein 17 results were collected. Finalizing the survey items, an online survey was conducted to Filipinos who has experience in using both Friendster and Facebook. A 7-point likert scale is used with ranks 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

**4.1 Measures**

The measures used in this study involved modifications of several existing items from various studies as well as new scales developed for the other measures of this research.

As cited in Zhang et al. (2009), it is widely held that satisfaction/dissatisfaction influences customers’ switching behavior in the marketing literature. In this paper, Satisfaction is operationalized as the user’s evaluation of his overall fulfillment with the incumbent SNS (Friendster).

Although several studies have taken switching cost as a moderating variable (Anton et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2009; etc.), this research takes switching cost as an independent variable
that directly affects the user’s switching intention as it is operationalized as the perceived magnitude of the additional time, resources, and effort that would be required to switch from one SNS to another. This encompasses the time that the user has to make in switching and the effort to establish the user’s new SNS profile.

Investment can be differentiated from switching cost as the perceived magnitude of the relationship assets and user created contents (UCCs) that would be lost or no longer useful if the users would switch. This includes the pictures uploaded in their Friendster profile; the testimonials they’ve received; the friends they’ve gathered and even the status that they’ve gained while using Friendster.

Alternative Attractiveness is operationalized as merely the positive characteristics of the competing SNS. Its items were also modified from Ping’s (1993) paper. In this study, social influence is measured through the scales from Lu et al.’s (2005) research and is operationalized as the positive or negative feelings as a result of interaction with others who are perceived to be similar, desirable, or expert.

Finally, we operationalized switching intention as the willingness of the user to switch and its items were derived from the scales that Anton et al., (2007) and Kim et al., (2006) used in their studies. Questions were also made to measure the user’s actual behavior to switch and it is operationalized as the result of the user’s positive intention to switch to a new SNS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Friendster’s services fulfilled my needs in SNSs.</td>
<td>Ping 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switching Cost</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>On the whole, I spent a lot of time, money, and effort to switch SNSs.</td>
<td>Ping 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Overall, I had put in a lot of pictures and other personal things in Friendster.</td>
<td>Ping 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Attractiveness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Facebook’s services are better than Friendster’s.</td>
<td>Ping 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Influence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>All of my friends were using Facebook which is why I felt that I should use it too.</td>
<td>Lu et al. 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switching Intention</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I considered switching from Friendster to Facebook.</td>
<td>Antón et al. 2007; Kim et al. 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Behavior</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do you maintain both your Friendster and Facebook accounts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of Measured Items
References


