Driving Forces behind Snapchat Success

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Snapchat application is a social networking and a multimedia messaging application designed for mobile devices. It provides both public content and private messaging capabilities. The offering of public content and mass content sharing capabilities has turned Snapchat into a successful and rapidly growing social media platform (Dunn 2016; Piwek and Joinson 2016; Sashittal et al. 2016). Given the immense success, popularity, and growth of Snapchat among young users, it is critical to gain a better understanding of why users adopt Snapchat application and continue using it. To understand users’ motives behind the adoption of Snapchat we can start with the review of the classic literature on new technology adoption. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a widely used and tested model to explain user adoption of new technology (Legris et al. 2003; Venkatesh and Davis 2000). TAM explains that Usability and Ease of Use are the two most important factors affecting adoption of new technology including software applications (Davis 1989). However, extant literature on Snapchat suggests that the application is complicated and by no means easy to use (e.g. Edwards 2017; Poltash 2012; Stern 2016). Now the question is how a mobile application that according to published articles is difficult to use can be this successful and be adopted by millions of users? This question formed the basis of our inquiry into the phenomenon. To answer the abovementioned question, this research takes on an interpretive approach and goes to the actual users of the Snapchat application to study their motives behind the adoption of Snapchat.

Analysis of results showed that staying connected with family and friends is the most important factor in adoption and continued use of the Snapchat application. Followed by “better communication”. When asked about better communication users indicated that with Snapchat they are able to send a variety of content and describe a situation in a more efficient way compared to traditional text messaging. Snapchat also is said to add fun and humor to communications among its users, this factor corresponds well with the enjoyment construct. The enjoyment is believed to be an important factor in the adoption of new technology (e.g. Antón et al. 2013; Dickinger et al. 2008; Song and Han 2009). Interestingly, this study revealed that ease of use is another driver of Snapchat adoption and continued use which is in accord with the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis 1989). However, this finding is at odds with the existing literature (e.g. Edwards 2017; Poltash 2012; Stern 2016). This discovery shows that the new generation (the technology natives) are interacting with technology in a different way. New generation perceives technology use and the effort needed to interact with technology in a different manner than the older generation.

Last but not least, Snapchat application unique features has an impact on Snapchat adoption. The unique features include humorous overlay content filters and time limited self-destructing feature for the shared content. The former directly affect the enjoyment of Snapchat experience that we have already discussed but the later taps into something new. The self-destructing feature of Snapchat enables users to share what they like without the fear of long-term and looming judgment from their counterparts or unintended negative consequences that may occur in future due to what they shared. Some experts believe that the self-destructing content feature of the Snapchat application was the most important factor in boosting Snapchat to the popularity and made many young users to adopt this new technology (e.g. Poltash 2012; Sashittal et al. 2016; Stern 2016). More research is needed to discover the exact nature of the human need for a care-free and judgment-free self-expression and how this need is affecting technology adoption and use.