Social Networking Sites in Thailand: motives and predictors of university students’ behaviours

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Abstract: Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have evolved dramatically as tools of online communication with capabilities of mass and interpersonal communication altogether. This study serves two purposes:  
a. to discover the reasons why people use SNSs  
b. to investigate the relationships of how motives for using SNSs influenced their usage.  
Factor analysis generated a four-motive structure as the reasons for using SNSs: to develop new friendship, to maintain relationship, to pass time and to comply with peer pressure. Relationship maintenance was a strong predictor of how long participants had used SNSs, whereas new friendship and passing time positively predicted how much time participants spent on SNSs.

Keywords: SNSs; social networking sites; motivation; blogs; innovation; learning; online communities; Thailand; motives; behaviours.


Biographical notes: Nuchada Dumrongsi is a Lecturer at the Albert Laurence School of Communication Arts, Assumption University, Thailand. She received her PhD in Communication Studies from Kent State University, USA. Her research interests are interpersonal communication, social support and persuasion.
1 Introduction

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have evolved dramatically as tools of online communication with capabilities of mass and interpersonal communication altogether. SNSs such as Hi5, Facebook and MySpace are member-based online communities that allow people to construct and broadcast their profile information, and communicate with others such as sharing a photo and sending public and personal messages (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Pempek et al., 2009). The advent of SNSs has facilitated online social connection to maintain pre-existing social connections and make new online friends (Ellison et al., 2007).

According to Pew internet and American Life Project’s January 2009, approximately 35% of American adult internet users have created a profile in an SNS. In Thailand, the number of internet users was jumped from 6.9 million in 2004 to 13.4 million users in 2007 (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, 2008). One of the most popular internet websites among teenagers and college students is a social networking website such as Hi5, Facebook, and YouTube. The latest evidence shows that Hi5 is the most popular SNS in Thailand. Approximately, 47.5% of Thai internet users have a profile in Hi5 (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, 2008).

The remarkable growth of social media technologies such as SNSs and blogs turns online communities into a global phenomenon where scholars have attempted to understand them as promptly as the technologies advance. As the online forums reach extensive audiences and gain more popularity, SNS and blogging features are integrated. Blogging services have been added to popular SNSs such as LiveJournal, MySpace and Friendster, whereas weblogging systems that emphasise media sharing such as Flickr and YouTube include SNS features and also serve as SNSs (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Lento et al., 2006).

Many scholars have studied blogs and social networking interchangeably (e.g., Lento et al., 2006; Williams and Merten, 2008). Questions have been raised to investigate why people maintain blogs, what they communicate on blogs, and how they use blogs in comparison with the mainstream media (Kim, 2008; Pempek et al., 2009; Rau et al., 2008; Ross et al., 2009; Williams and Merten, 2008). The early users may use blogs as their personal homepage or online diary (Jung et al., 2007). However, blogs are surfaced through internet that allows interactivity and social networking among users around the world. When a personal blog begins to serve as a mass medium, the line is less clear between characteristics of the personal blog and those of the mainstream SNSs (Technorati, 2008).

Empirical research begin to differentiate between blogs and the use of SNSs. Scholars have examined the relationship between the use of SNSs and the building and maintaining of social capital (e.g., Ellison et al., 2007), social networking experiences (e.g., Pempek et al., 2009), intimacy and lurking in SNSs (e.g., Rau et al., 2008),
individual differences and the use of SNSs (e.g., Krämer and Winter, 2008; Ross et al., 2009). However, little is known about what motivate people to use SNSs and how their motives are related to SNSs usage. Thus, an investigation on SNSs uses and gratifications (U&G) may help us develop and promote SNSs usage to fulfill various needs of the users better.

Since 2007, SNSs have gained more attention and access from Thai users owing to the lower cost of broadband internet services (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, 2008). On the other hand, empirical evidence in Thailand is limited to understand why SNSs are well accepted, especially why global SNSs such as Hi5 are preferred over other sites. Thus far, two major Thai SNSs are Bangkokspace and Myfriend with the estimated number of registered users at less than one million in 2008 (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, 2008). When compared with other countries such as South Korea, the largest SNS is a Korean-based site – Cyworld with the approximate number of 20 million users (Shim et al., 2008). Also, StudiVZ, a German website, is the largest SNS in Germany with around three million users (Krämer and Winter, 2008). Our study is significant with an aim to help local SNS companies in Thailand understand and serve users better through enhanced design, functions and services. A better understanding of why and how Thais use SNSs would allow local SNS developers to compete with global ones as well as to call for more support from related parties such as government, private sector and public for developing and promoting Thai-based SNSs.

To begin with, our study was to explore why, in only a past few years, almost 70% of internet users in Thailand participate in global SNSs (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, 2008). This study serves two purposes:

a) to discover the reasons why people use SNSs
b) to investigate the relationships of how their motives for using SNSs influenced their usage.

Different from previous research, this study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore SNS motivations directly from users. The theoretical framework and past research were presented in the next section.

2 Uses and Gratifications

U&G serves as a theoretical framework to explain SNS gratifications among users in Thailand. U&G has been used to explain uses and effects of interpersonal and mediated communication channels (Rubin, 1993; Rubin and Bantz, 1989; Rubin and Rubin, 1989; Rubin et al., 1988) as well as uses and effects of new media technologies (e.g., Flaherty et al., 1998; Papacharissi, 2002; Pornsakulvanich, 2007; Pornsakulvanich et al., 2008). It has been studied, expanded and revised over the years (Katz et al., 1974; Palmgreen, 1984; Palmgreen et al., 1980; Rubin, 2002; Rubin and Windahl, 1986).

U&G is based on a psychological perspective that emphasises an active role of people in selecting media to fulfill their needs. The theory focuses on explaining how and why people use the media rather than how the media influence people (Klapper, 1963). According to Rubin (2002), the theory rests on several assumptions. First, people are active, goal-directed, and motivated in selecting media. Second, people select and use the
appropriate channels of communication to gratify their needs and wants. Third, different people have diverse communication behaviours, which are based on social and psychological factors. Then, social and psychological situations influence how well media can satisfy people’s needs and wants. Next, media can be functional alternatives to other channels of communication. Lastly, people are usually more influential than media, but not always.

Katz et al. (1974) suggested that motivation influences communication choices, strategies and behaviours. Scholars have examined motives for using various types of new media technologies such as cable television (Becker et al., 1983), political bulletin boards (Garramone et al., 1986), VCRs (Rubin and Bantz, 1989), remote controls (Ferguson, 1994), the internet (Charney and Greenberg, 2002; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000; Pornsakulvanich, 2007; Wolfradt and Doll, 2001) and a personal webpage (Papacharissi, 2002). For example, Rubin and Bantz (1989) suggested that VCR motives reflected both interpersonal communication needs (e.g., socialisation) and mass communication needs (e.g., entertainment). Charney and Greenberg (2002) specified eight internet motives: keep informed, diversion, peer identity, good feelings, communication, sights and sounds, career, and coolness.

As guided by U&G, motivation is a major concept to understand media use, selection and behaviour. This study focused on motives for using SNSs. An SNS serves as a diversified and boundless place where prospective consumers of various services and products express and reveal themselves. Thus, SNSs have brought an opportunity for practitioners and scholars to publicly access personal information and understand the reasons, both socially and psychologically, why and how people use SNSs to fulfil their needs. As more and more people become SNSs users and bloggers, a better understanding of SNS motives and behaviours will allow us to interact and network with them in a more productive and innovative way for academic, commercial, and business purposes. As noted previously, blogs and SNSs functions are added to each other system, as they both involve in constructing, maintaining and exchanging personal profiles between authors and users through online network. Therefore, literature pertaining to motives and behaviour in both SNSs and blogs were reviewed and discussed in the following section.

3 Social networking sites motivation and behaviour

Past research on SNSs and blogs have explored and classified motives and behaviour differently through various perspectives. Some studies employed a social networking framework. Lento et al. (2006) investigated Wallop, a personal publishing and SNS accessed by invited users, and reported that social ties were not equal to influencing users to remain active. Rather, pre-existing social ties attracted participants and results in a higher rate of retention. Williams and Merten (2008) examined online social networking contents and found that adolescents participated in SNSs to share family and social issues, discuss risk behaviour, disclose personal information, and interact with peers.
Recently, Ross et al. (2009) provided the evidence that Facebook users with high motivation spent time per day on the site than did those with low motivation. The study did not specify motives into categories. Pempek et al. (2009) classified nine motives for using Facebook from open-ended responses. These motives included communicating with friends, looking at or posting photos, entertainment/passing time, planning events, sending/receiving messages, making/reading wall posts, getting to know people better, getting contact information and presenting oneself.

Other studies examined motives and behaviour based on blog writers’ perspective. Nardi et al. (2004) unfolded five motives through in-depth interviews with blog authors: to document life experiences, to provide commentary and opinions, to express deeply felt emotions, to articulate ideas through writing, and to form and maintain community forums. Similarly, Huang et al. (2007) found five motivations as predictors of information-oriented and interaction-oriented blogging behaviours (i.e., self-expression, life documenting, commenting, community forum participation and information seeking). Moreover, Jung et al. (2007) reported five motives on hosting personal weblog similar to Papacharissi’s (2002) motives on hosting personal homepage: entertainment, self-expression, professional advancement, passing time and communication with family and friends. Nevertheless, new trend was not a salient motive for blogging. Also, users in Taiwan were motivated to blog by ease of use and enjoyment, and knowledge sharing (Hsu and Lin, 2008).

Several scholars attempted to investigate motives through readers’ perspectives instead. According to Beaubien (2007), about 50% of survey respondents read blogs for entertainment and learning about specific interest. Huang et al. (2008) revealed four motives for reading blogs: affective exchange, information search, entertainment and getting on the bandwagon.

Altogether, the literature provides consistent evidence that users, as authors and readers, tend to participate in SNSs and weblogs owing to similar reasons. Generally, people use SNSs and blogs as functions for documentation, self-presentation, social interaction and entertainment. Previous research has applied motive scales for a certain medium to examining motives for using SNSs and blogs (e.g., Huang et al., 2007; Jung et al., 2007; Ross et al., 2009). However, social networking and blogging may possess particular characteristics different from traditional and online media, leading to different motives and use. For example, blogs are perceived as better sources of information and more credible than the mainstream media because they provide opinionated, analytical, personal and independent contents (Johnson and Kaye, 2004). An exploration of the motives inductively from users’ self-reported reasons enables us to clarify the motives and develop a scale to measure them more precisely.

This study was aimed to provide a supplement to existing findings through a different research method. Methodological triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative analyses was used to incorporate SNS motives emerged directly from content analysis with those from factor analysis. The triangulation method serves as a dialectic explanation that incorporates both participants’ and researchers’ perceptions in explaining SNS motives. Additionally, this study is among the first to provide empirical evidence of SNS motives and behaviour in Thailand. SNS is one among the latest communication innovations adopted worldwide at varying rates. SNS has been well accepted in other countries for several years. However, Thailand is not the first to adopt the innovation, but seems to fall in between the categories of ‘early adopters’ and ‘early majority’, who are the second and third fastest categories of innovation adopters.
according to Rogers’ (1964) diffusion of innovations. In Thailand, SNSs have gained attention only few years ago when the national survey by the government office first reported statistics of SNS use. Thus far, little is known about how and why users in Thailand participate in SNSs. One empirical research revealed that the major motive for Thais to access SNSs was convenience (National Electronics and Computer Technology Center, 2008), which differs from those of previous research. The findings from our investigation would encourage and promote the use of SNSs to serve purposes for academia and business sectors more efficiently. Two research questions were proposed.

**RQ1: What were motives for using social networking sites?**

**RQ2: How did motives for using social networking sites predict use?**

## 4 Research design and method

This research study employed a cross-sectional design and included two data collection to answer the two research questions. The first study used qualitative analysis to explore SNS motives in Research Question 1. Content analysis was conducted to categorise SNS motives derived from open-ended responses and served as a basis for scale development used in the second study. The second study used quantitative approach to verify the SNS motives and examine their relationships with SNS use in Research Question 2.

### 4.1 Study 1

#### 4.1.1 Sample

Participants (N = 281) were undergraduates who currently enrolled in classes at the large university in Thailand. A screening question asking whether the participants have used SNSs such as Hi5, Facebook and MySpace in the past three months was presented as the first question. Thirteen participants who reported ‘No’ were excluded from the study. Thus, the sample included 268 participants. Then, participants were asked to indicate a reason(s) why they used SNSs in an open-ended question. They also responded to several questions asking about the SNS that they used the most, a number of months that they had used SNSs, time in hours and minutes that they spent each time and weekly on SNSs, and a location where they usually accessed to SNSs. Finally, they completed demographic questions about gender, age, income and college year.

Participants were 171 females (63.8%) and 97 males (36.2%). They were in age ranged from 18 to 28 (M = 21.01 years old; SD = 1.46). One hundred and forty participants (52.5%) were senior students, 63 participants (23.5%) and 62 participants (23.1%) were sophomore and junior students, respectively. Only two participants were freshmen.

About 78.7% of the participants specified Hi5 as the SNS that they used the most, 12.3% mostly used Facebook, 3.7% mostly accessed YouTube, and less than 3% reported MySpace and others as the SNS that they mostly visited. Also, participants reported a varied number of months that they had used SNSs with a range from 1 month to 48 months (M = 18.19 months; SD = 13.84). About 22.6% of participants had used SNSs for 12 months, 11.7% had used SNSs for 24 months, and 11.3% had used SNSs for 36 months.
Approximately, 21.1% each spent 30 min or 60 min on SNSs each time, 12.0% spent 90 min, 11.3% spent 120 min, whereas 18% spent less than 30 min ($M = 70.52; SD = 58.78$). Overall, participants indicated that they spent time on SNSs between 5 and 6 h during a week ($M = 343.05; SD = 317.40$). Most of the participants accessed SNSs at home (89.2%), followed by internet café (4.5%), and school (3.4%).

4.1.2 Measurement

SNS motives. SNS motives were operationalised as the reasons why people used SNSs. The common term ‘blog’ was used in the measure rather than “social networking sites” because it is more familiar to general people. However, to establish a frame of reference to blogs as SNSs, participants were instructed to “indicate a reason(s) why you use blogs (e.g., Hi5, Facebook, MySpace)” before they described their SNS motives. Then, to solicit exhaustive reasons, the open-ended question, “I use blogs because...”, asked participants to write three reasons why they used SNSs. Finally, the reported reasons for using SNSs were categorised through content analysis.

SNS use. Five items were developed to measure the most visited SNS, length of use, duration of time spent on SNSs and a place for SNS access. The first item asked about the SNS that they used the most, followed by three questions of “how long have you used blogs?”, “how much time do you use blogs each time?”, and “how much time do you use blogs in a week?” The last question was to specify a place where participants usually used SNSs (i.e., home, school, workplace, internet café and others). Again, the word ‘blog’ was used in the five items instead of the technical term ‘social networking sites’ to avoid unclear meanings.

5 Results

Research Question 1 was to explore motives for using SNSs. Content analysis was conducted to develop categories that emerged from the reported reasons. All participants ($N = 268$) reported their first reason of why they used SNSs, whereas 83.9% and 54.5% of participants reported their second and third reasons, respectively. A total of 493 reported reasons were analysed by two coders to develop categories of SNS motives emerged from the qualitative data.

According to Dillard (1989), content analysis of the reported reasons for using SNSs was conducted based on two criteria: clarity and content. The reported reasons that were not clearly stated or were not relevant to SNS motives were excluded. Two coders independently analysed a random sample of about 20% of the reported reasons. Through discussions, seven SNS motives emerged:

1. relationship maintenance
2. new friendship
3. self-expression
4. entertainment
passing time
trend
peer pressure (see Table 1).

Table 1 Categories of motives for using Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive categories</th>
<th>Reported reasons n (%)</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship maintenance</td>
<td>168 (34.1)</td>
<td>To talk with friends, to meet old friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>111 (22.5)</td>
<td>To update pictures, to check comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New friendship</td>
<td>71 (14.4)</td>
<td>To make friends, to know other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>48 (9.7)</td>
<td>To play a game, to have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>24 (4.9)</td>
<td>To follow my friends, to accept friends’ invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passing time</td>
<td>15 (3.1)</td>
<td>To kill my time, have nothing to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>8 (1.6)</td>
<td>To be in trend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 268. The total number of reported reasons was 493. Forty-eight reported reasons (9.7%) were not classified using the seven motive categories.

After obtaining the seven categories of the SNS motives, the two coders independently analysed the reported blog reasons. Approximately, 90.3% of the entire SNS reasons could be classified into the seven categories. The reported reasons that were not classified into any motive categories were such as “to improve my computer skills”, “my teacher asked me to create one”, and “to save cost for communicating with friends”. On the basis of a random sample of 20% of the data, the intercoder reliability assessed by Scott’s (1955) Pi was 0.92.

Then, the seven SNS motive categories were verified for their statistical existence. Several statements from the participants’ responses were selected to represent each SNS motive and developed into a 5-point Likert scale for factor analysis in Study 2.

5.1 Study 2

5.1.1 Sample

Participants (N = 215) were undergraduate students who currently enrolled in classes at the large university in Thailand. Nineteen responses were discarded and then resulted in a final sample of 196 participants. Thirteen participants had not accessed SNSs in the past three months, and six participants did not complete the questionnaire. Participants indicated their reasons for using SNSs on Likert-typed questions and responded to the questions about their use and demographics similar to those in Study 1.

Participants were 118 females (60.2%) and 78 males (39.8%). They were ranged in age between 17 and 26 (M = 20.17 years old; SD = 1.60). Forty-two participants (21.4%) were freshmen, 73 participants (37.2.5%), 34 participants (17.3%) and 47 participants (24.0%) were sophomore, junior and senior students, respectively.
Again, a majority of participants (74.0%) reported Hi5 as the SNS that they used the most, 11.7% and 7.7% mostly used Facebook and YouTube, respectively. MySpace was accessed the least. Also, participants had used SNSs for less than two years ($M = 17.18$ months; $SD = 12.32$). About 22.4% of participants had participated in SNSs for 12 months, 19.0% and 8.6% had used SNSs for 24 months and for 36 months, respectively.

About 31.4% of participants spent time between 61 and 180 min on SNSs each time whereas 19.5% and 28.1% spent 30 min or 60 min, respectively ($M = 89.52$; $SD = 71.68$). Overall, participants indicated that they spent time on SNSs about 7 h during a week ($M = 424.51$; $SD = 436.92$). Most of the participants accessed SNSs at home (92.9%) while some participated in SNSs at school (2.6%).

Furthermore, gender differences were significant in SNSs use each time, $t(183) = 7.22$, $p < 0.01$, and in a week, $t(181) = 4.57$, $p < 0.01$. Females spent more time on SNSs each time ($M = 99.62$ min; $SD = 75.77$), and during a week, ($M = 467.46$ min; $SD = 465.56$) than did males, ($M = 74.72$ min each time; $SD = 62.81$) ($M = 362.67$ min weekly; $SD = 386.69$).

### 5.1.2 Measurement

**SNS motives.** The scale measured a degree to which people rated their own reasons for using SNSs. The items were developed from participants’ responses in Study 1 to represent the seven SNS motives (i.e., relationship maintenance, self-expression, new friendship, entertainment, peer pressure, passing time and trend). The final SNS motive scale consisted of 25 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Not at All” (1) to “Exactly” (5) like one’s own reasons for using blogs. For example, the items were: “I use blog to chat with my friends anytime”, “to find new friends”, “because I have nothing to do”, and “because my friends have it”. Factor analysis yielded a four-motive structure with 16 items remaining as shown in Table 2.

**SNS use.** The five items asking about participants’ SNS usage patterns were similar to those used in Study 1. The items measured the most visited SNS, length of use, duration of time spent on SNSs and a place for accessing SNSs.

### Table 2  
Factor loadings for SNS motives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale items</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motive 1: New friendship</strong> ($\alpha = 0.88$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make friends</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet new people</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about new people and culture</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find new friends</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motive 2: Relationship maintenance</strong> ($\alpha = 0.82$)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with friends</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To chat with my friends anytime</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To contact old friends</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To keep in touch with close friends</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2  Factor loadings for SNS motives (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale items</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motive 3: Passing time (α = 0.82)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I have nothing to do</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I am bored</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I have free time</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make me relax</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motive 4: Peer pressure (α = 0.76)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because my friends want me to use it</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because my friends have it</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I follow my friends</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because my friends invited me</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 196. Means were computed from a 5-point scale ranging from Not at all (1) to Exactly (5) like the participants’ own reasons for using blogs.

6 Results

Study 2 had two purposes. The first purpose was to quantitatively analyse SNS motive factors that emerged from Study 1. The second purpose was to answer Research Question 2 asking how motives predicted SNS use.

6.1 SNS motive structure

Factor analysis was conducted to further verify the existence of the seven SNS motives: relationship maintenance, self-expression, new friendship, entertainment, pressure, passing time and trend. All 25 items were computed in principal component analysis with varimax rotation. A factor was retained based on the 0.60/0.40 rule and when an eigenvalue was greater than 1.0. The factor analysis generated four factors that accounted for 67.96% of the total variance with 16 items retained (see Table 2). Six items were not loaded on any factors and then were discarded. Another three items were not loaded as a meaningful factor and were dropped. As a result, three SNS motives of self-expression, entertainment and trend were excluded. Factor analysis generated a four-SNS motive structure.

Motives 1: New friendship, accounted for 35.48% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 5.68). This factor reflected using SNSs because the user wanted to build new relationships with someone who shared similar interests and to know more people. All four items were loaded on the factor as expected (Cronbach α = 0.88).
Motive 2: Relationship maintenance, accounted for 12.45% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 1.99). This factor reflected using SNSs because the user wanted to contact and communicate to the person with whom they already had the relationship such as old friends and close friends. All four items were loaded on the factor as expected (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.82$).

Motive 3: Passing time, accounted for 10.52% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 1.68). This factor reflected using SNSs because the user wanted to relax or enjoy their free time. Three items yielded factor loadings as expected, and one item of the entertainment factor was loaded additionally (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.82$). The item of ‘to make me relax’ was aligned with the motive of passing time rather than with the entertainment.

Motive 4: Peer pressure, accounted for 9.51% of the total variance (eigenvalue = 1.52). This factor reflected using SNSs because the user was motivated or invited by their friends to participate in SNSs. All four items generated factor loadings as expected (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.76$).

In summary, the results from factor analysis were different from those of content analysis. Seven motive categories emerged from content analysis, whereas four motive factors were derived from factor analysis. Self-expression, entertainment, and trend were not motives for using SNSs. In Study 1, the top three reasons why participants used SNSs were to maintain the relationship, to express self, and to find new friends. However, the most three salient motives for SNS access in Study 2 were to maintain the relationship ($M = 3.85, SD = 0.86$), to pass time ($M = 3.42, SD = 0.94$), and to follow friends ($M = 3.18, SD = 0.84$), respectively.

6.2 Motives as predictors of SNS use

Research Question 2 asked how SNS motives predicted use. Hierarchical regression analyses with stepwise method were conducted to examine how the four SNS motives predicted SNS use in terms of length of use, and duration of time spent on SNSs each time and weekly.

The linear combination of the four SNS motives did not significantly predict the length (months) that participants had used SNSs. Only a motive for relationship maintenance tended to be a significant predictor of length of SNS use ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$). It alone accounted for all 8% of the variance of length of use, $R^2 = 0.08$, $F(1, 172) = 14.24$, $p < 0.01$, whereas the other three SNS motives did not contribute to the variance at all (see Table 3).

The linear combination of the four SNS motives did not significantly predict the duration (minutes) that participants had spent time on SNSs each time. Similarly, among the four SNS motives, only new friendship was a significant predictor of how much time participants spent on SNSs, $R^2 = 0.03$, $F(1, 183) = 5.09$, $\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$. The result indicated that approximately 3% of the variance of the duration of SNS use each time was accounted for by the motive to have new friendship. Other SNS motives did not generate an additional variance (see Table 3).
Table 3  Multiple regression analysis for four SNS motives predicting SNS use (N = 196)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How long have used blogs? (months)</td>
<td>New friendship</td>
<td>–1.31</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>–0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship maintenance</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passing time</td>
<td>–1.29</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>–0.56</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>–0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 = 0.08^{**} )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time spent on blogs each time? (minutes)</td>
<td>New friendship</td>
<td>11.49</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>0.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship maintenance</td>
<td>–6.21</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>–0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passing time</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>–3.27</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>–0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 = 0.03^{*} )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time spent on blogs in a week? (minutes)</td>
<td>New friendship</td>
<td>63.12</td>
<td>31.32</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship maintenance</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>47.29</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passing time</td>
<td>113.37</td>
<td>34.41</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>–50.64</td>
<td>41.17</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 = 0.09^{***} )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001. \)

The linear combination of the two SNS motives significantly predicted the duration (minutes) that participants had spent time on SNSs in a week, \( R^2 = 0.09, F(2, 180) = 10.19, p < 0.01 \), accounted for approximately 9\% of the variance of the duration of SNS use weekly. The motives of new friendship, \( R^2 = 0.02, F(1, 180) = 4.06, \beta = 0.15, p < 0.05 \), and passing time, \( R^2 = 0.07, F(1, 181) = 16.04, \beta = 0.24, p < 0.01 \), were significant predictors of time participants spent on SNSs weekly (see Table 3). Passing time was a stronger predictor explaining 7\% of the variance, whereas new friendship contributed only an additional 2\% of the variance.

Overall, only one motive, peer pressure, did not significantly influence any SNS use while the other three motives for relationship maintenance, new friendship and passing time were significant predictors. Participants who were motivated to maintain existing relationship with friends were more likely to use SNSs for a longer period of time. The more they wanted to contact and communicate with long-time friends, the longer they have used and participated in SNSs. Moreover, participants tended to stay longer in SNSs each time when they wanted to find and build new relationship with others. When analysing SNS weekly use, participants tended to spend more time in SNSs to seek new friendship as well as to pass time.

7  Discussion and implications

7.1  SNS motivation

As more and more people turn to use SNSs as a new medium to communicate with others, we begin to question why SNSs are widely accepted and how people use them.
This study is one among other prior research to answer these questions through a different approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The triangulation of the two methods yields different SNS motive categories. Content analysis unfolded seven SNS motives (i.e., relationship maintenance, self-expression, new friendship, entertainment, peer pressure, passing time and trend) that emerged directly from the participants’ self-reported reasons. Among these seven motives, self-expression, social interaction and entertainment are consistent with the findings of past research. Documentation is not reported as a motive for using SNSs as shown in the literature. Perhaps, documentation is not the motive but represents an action that follows a certain motive. People choose to provide documentation on SNSs not because they want to write and record about themselves, but to seek for interactive exchange of comments and opinions within their network. This motive may not be fulfilled in other traditional media channels such as newspaper, magazines, books and publications.

On the other hand, factor analysis produced a four-motive structure of SNS motivation similar to four of the seven motives – new friendship, relationship maintenance, passing time and peer pressure. However, self-expression, entertainment and trend were not loaded as independent or meaningful factors. Probably, the SNS motive to pass time partly reflects entertainment as indicated by one item “to make me relax” that incorporated with the passing time motive instead of the entertainment. Although past research reported “trend” as a motive for online social networking (e.g., Huang et al., 2008; Jung et al., 2007), the findings of the current study seem to provide more evidence that “to be in trend” may not reflect a motive for SNS access as they did in the past few years. Our conclusion is that SNSs may not be longer perceived as new or trendy to broad audience when they gain more popularity.

Surprisingly, in this study, self-expression is not a salient motive for SNS use. The three items of “to see others’ pictures and comments”, “to post my pictures”, and “because it is popular” were loaded together as a motive for self-expression, but they do not represent self-expression precisely. The finding differs from past research. The literature shows that self-presentation has been a prominent factor in the study of SNSs as one of the major SNS motivation and behaviour (e.g. Jung et al., 2007; Pempek et al., 2009; Shim et al., 2008). It is possible that people are motivated to participate in SNSs differently due to individual differences. According to Krämer and Winter (2008), self-presentation on SNSs was influenced by personal characteristics such as extraversion and self-efficacy. Future researchers need to consider personal characteristics and traits related to impression management when investigating self-presentation as a motivation for using SNSs.

7.2 Motivation as predictors of SNS use

A combination of the four SNS motives did not predict use. However, new friendship, relationship maintenance and passing time were significant predictors of SNS use in different ways. Relationship maintenance is the strongest predictor of SNS use. The more participants wanted to build or maintain relationship with others, the more they stayed and spent time longer in SNSs. The results are consistent with the literature based on a social networking perspective showing that pre-existing social ties attracted SNS users to remain active (Lento et al., 2006). The implication reflects in the questions whether and how these motives are similar to or different from those of other media. The findings contribute to U&G as a theoretical framework to explain that people are motivated and
goal-oriented in selecting media to gratify needs. SNS users are influenced to access the sites by the three significant motives – new friendship, relationship maintenance and passing time. These motives represent interpersonal motives that also serve as motives for using certain media such as VCR (Rubin and Bantz, 1989) and mobile phone (Dumrongsiri and Pornsakulvanich, 2008). Perhaps, people may have a similarly primary set of motives that lead to different media use. Future research that synthesises prior studies on motives of various media is essential to help clarify this speculation.

Passing time was the second strongest predictor of SNS access. The more participants wanted to kill their free time, the longer hours they spent on SNSs. On the basis of U&G, the finding implies that Thai adolescents may perceive SNSs as a functional alternative for passing time. This notion provides a caution to a concerned party such as parents, practitioners, scholars, and government to promote SNS use in a more productive way. We suggested that the monitoring system could be developed in terms of policy legislation and content control. The government may introduce regulations that restrict the misconduct of SNS users as well as policies that encourage and facilitate service providers to improve Thai-based SNSs. At the same time, other sectors such as schools, universities and private organisations could initiate programmes and activities that encourage SNS use with creative and productive contents. The examples include SNS public ranking, SNS contests and educational SNSs for classes or seminars. Goldman et al. (2008) found that the use of seminar blogs increased students’ participation, interaction and learning.

Lastly, peer pressure did not predict any SNS use. Using SNSs demands much effort and commitment from users to remain active. Thus, they are to be self-motivated to participate and spend time in SNSs. Peer pressure reflects an external motive produced by others. When compared with the three significant SNS motives, they tend to represent self-driven motives to seek new friends, maintain contact with existing friends, and pass their free time. Possibly, people may not be willing to spend more hours in SNSs if they are not motivated by themselves to perceive SNSs as a functional alternative to other media. Also, the three significant motives seem to characterise socialisation motives to interact with friends and others. Socialisation requires a longer time spending in SNSs to learn, share and exchange information than peer pressure.

8 Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted with consideration. First, the use of SNSs may differ by demographics and personal characteristics. For example, people with different age have different needs and motives. The four motives derived from this study may be generalised to adolescents’ U&G of SNSs, but do not represent the SNS motives for other age groups. Rogers (1964) suggested that people adopt innovations at different rates. Innovators and early adopters tend to be younger and have a higher social and financial status than later adopters. The university students’ motives for SNS use may characterise those of innovators and early adopters. Other adopter categories should be investigated.
Second, future research need to further explore SNS use in various contexts such as online support communities and educational-based groups. Some of the motives such as passing time and peer pressure may not serve as the reasons for participating in certain SNSs. For example, people who use health-related SNSs may be motivated by new friendships rather than by passing time.

Finally, technologies are developing and changing. Currently, SNSs have gained popularity in Thailand for a few years. The SNS lifecycle is rising from the beginning stage to reach critical mass. How and why people use SNSs could be changed along the technology lifecycle. People may be motivated to use SNSs for self-presentation and entertainment when they first adopt the innovation and then for social interactions when they become more familiar with it and use SNSs for its full potential.

9 Conclusion

This study had two purposes:

a to explore motives for using SNSs
b to examine how motives predicted the use of SNSs among university students in Thailand.

Triangulation of content analysis and factor analysis yielded different motive categories for using SNSs. Seven motives emerged from the content analysis were: relationship maintenance, self-expression, new friendship, entertainment, peer pressure, passing time and trend. However, four SNS motives were generated by factor analysis: new friendship, relationship maintenance, passing time and peer pressure. Among the four motives, relationship maintenance was a predictor of how long participants had used SNSs, whereas new friendship and passing time significantly influenced how much time participants spent on SNSs each time and during a week, respectively.

On the basis of the findings, adolescents are more likely to pass time using SNSs. This observation raises a concern for related parties such as parents, school administrators, practitioners and government to initiate policies or programmes that encourage Thai youths to pass their free time in a more productive way using SNSs. Future studies may focus more on how to incorporate SNS use into an educational context. Lastly, because university students tend to characterise early adopters of innovations, it is recommended that future research may investigate SNS motives among other adopter categories such as late adopters and laggards to generalise the findings to other groups of SNS users.

References


