

The Attractiveness of Different Online Formats Motives and Frequencies of Use

Jelena FILIPOVIĆ

University of Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract: The aim of this study is to investigate motives that influence differences in usage of various Internet formats, by applying the uses and gratifications theory. Five kinds of Internet use motivations were analyzed: information, entertainment, convenience, social interaction and economic; in correlation with six types of online formats: websites, emails, blogs, chats, social networking websites and Internet shops. It was established that the type of the motivation does not influence the user's frequency of utilization of particular Internet format significantly. However, the intensity of motivation positively affects user's willingness to visit some Internet formats more often. These two findings are thoroughly discussed in the paper in terms of their significance for marketing managers involved in planning of effective marketing communications. The role of the gender in the usage of different online formats is also considered.

Key words: internet communications, theory of uses and gratifications, gender, motivation, online formats.

Even though the global reach and relevance are Internet's inherent features, it appears that it has raised much more awareness among scholars in more developed countries, usually characterized by high penetration rates, than in transitional countries. Indeed, with the exception of China, it could be argued that the impact of the Internet as a medium in transitional societies is considerably underrepresented in the body of the subject contemporary academic research and literature. This study failed to find any research related to Internet usage motivation in Serbia or in Western Balkan countries; therefore it could be asserted that this issue has induced hardly any interest in scholars in this region thus far.

The present study has been placed in Serbia, an Eastern European country, with the Internet penetration rate of 56.2% (slightly under the European average of 58.3%, and significantly over the world's average, of 30.2% - Internet usage in Europe). Given the peculiarities of Serbia, in terms of situational factors that could affect Internet use patterns, such as: (1) difficulties with e-commerce – high shipping costs, lack of Paypal system, an

increase in consumers' ethnocentrism (MARINKOVIĆ *et al.*, 2011), unwillingness of retailers to ship second hand goods to Serbia, etc.; (2) high Facebook penetration rate – 48.61% of Serbian population has Facebook profile, while the European average rate is 30.21% (Facebook statistic by country); and (3) the paucity of certain Internet formats (e.g., websites for customer reviews, blogs on non-fashion topics, specialized national web stores) in Serbian language, but potentially significant capacities of this market (TRAVICA *et al.*, 2007), some better understanding of Serbian users behaviour in web space is needed. The aim of this exploratory study is to investigate effects of individual's Internet use motivations and gender on the frequency of use of different online formats in Serbia, in order to fill the void in the literature on a country and advance the knowledge on Internet use that can be useful to other developing countries.

■ Literature review

Uses and gratifications theory has been widely employed in the research concerning why individuals use different kinds of media, from its formulation in the 70s (KATZ *et al.*, 1973-1974), till nowadays. This theory acknowledges psychological and social factors that affect individual's behavior in communication and consider audience to be active, i.e., individuals use media to achieve some goals and gratifications. The gratifications that the audience can accomplish through media usage are numerous: usefulness (people use media to execute some tasks), intention (media content determines the usage – reading news to get informed, watching comedy to laugh, etc.), selectivity according to person's interests and resistance to influences (members of the audience values media content independently to media persuasion (BLUMLER, 1979). Uses and gratifications studies have dealt with all kinds of communication formats, such as: television (JEFFERS, 1975; HEETER, 1985), newspapers (Westley and Severin, 1964), video games (LUCAS & SHERRY, 2004) and Internet (KORGAONKAR & WOLIN, 1999); PAPACHARISSI & RUBIN, 2000), to name some of them. It could be noted that numerous studies (DIMMICK *et al.*, 2004; KINK & HESS, 2008) have examined the influence of different motives to the individual's choice between the Internet and traditional media, however, the relevance of a person's various motives for the usage of different Internet communication formats has remained rather uncovered by research.

Furthermore, during the past two decades, many studies have tried to reveal different aspects and motives of Internet usage. For example, Korgaonkar and WOLIN (1999) studied 41 various motives, classified in 7 groups, why people use the Internet. The numerous research (CUILLIER & PIOTROWSKI, 2009; PARKER & PLANK, 2000) discovered that seeking information is the crucial motive why people use this medium. Moreover, people also use World Wide Web to establish social connections in virtual society and try new, different and improved versions of themselves (LAROSE & EASTIN, 2004). Social context is often correlated to the entertainment and this aspect of the Internet is usually highly appreciated by users. CHEN & WELLS (1999) and others (JOINES *et al.*, 2003) assert that amusement affects a person's attitude toward a website and list entertainment as one of the three main motives for the usage of this medium. Therefore, it was fruitful to consider that:

H1: A person's dominant motive for the Internet use will affect their usage frequency of different types of the online formats.

In addition to the type of the principal motive that the person is driven by, the intensity of motivation should be also taken into examination. The relevance of the intensity of motivation was investigated with regard to online games (CHANG & ZHANG, 2008), websites (SANJOSE-CABEZUDO *et al.*, 2009), web 2.0 (AHARONY, 2009), social networking sites (KIM *et al.*, 2010), etc. In line with findings of previous studies, we hypothesized:

H2: Users with higher levels of a specific kind of motivation will use certain online formats more frequently. Actually, users with stronger socialization motivation will use social media (including Web 2.0 formats) more often, while users with stronger economic and convenience motivation will visit online shops more frequently. Websites and emails as the ubiquitous online formats are assumed to be quite equally used by all respondents.

Even though the motives were proved to be prominent in the explanation of users' choice for the use of different media, some demographic attributes cannot be disregarded either. There is a consensus among scholars (WEISER, 2000; GUROL, 2010; FILIPOVIC, 2010) that males and females tend to use different Internet formats in a different manner and capacity. Hence:

H3: The frequency of usage of different online formats will differ by user's gender.

■ Method

Participants

The sample comprised 228 university students (228 out of 289 enrolled respondents completed all questions in the survey), recruited from five undergraduate courses at the large University in Belgrade, Serbia. Participants volunteered to participate in the experiment in return for extra credit in courses where the researchers had obtained the permission of their instructors. Of the participants, 70.2% were females and 29.8% were males; ages ranged from 20 to 24 ($M=21.8$, $SD=1.7$)

Materials

The research questionnaire consisted of two parts, investigating respondents Internet use's motivation and the frequency of the usage of the particular online formats. Building upon the PAPACHARISSI & RUBIN's (2000), study, extensively recognized in the subject literature (KO *et al.*, 2005), the list of the statements of the first section was developed. Given that they addressed four different motives for Internet usage, represented by 16 statements (4 for each of them) and that later literature distinguished one more – economic motivation (KORGAONKAR & WOLIN, 1999; CHANG *et al.*, 2010), the questionnaire was supplemented with three additional statements. Some assertions were altered and reformulated in order to reflect better a meaning of the certain motives. The list of the statements is provided in the table 1.

The calculated values of the Cronbach's α were: 0.830 for entertainment, 0.642 for convenience, 0.742 for social interaction and 0.771 for economic motivation. Since the generally accepted level of the Cronbach's α for a research is 0.6 (Bryman, 2008) we conclude that the used questionnaire is valid for the four listed motives. However, the value of Cronbach's α for the information motivation was 0.513, when we tested for the 4 claims, but 0.612 if we exclude the claim "I'll go to the Internet to follow national and international news". In order to have satisfactory level of internal consistency, we excluded the quoted claim and analyzed information motivation through three remaining items. A six-point scale, ranging from 1 ("completely irrelevant") to 7 ("highly relevant"), was used to measure respondent's motivations for using the Internet in general.

Table 1 - The list of statements concerning motivations used in questionnaire

<i>Information</i>	<i>Convenience</i>	<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>Social interaction</i>	<i>Economic</i>
To learn about unknown things	I can get what I want (information, products, etc.) for less effort	To pass time	To keep up with what's going on with my friends and acquaintances	To buy products domestically (Maxi markets, eDucan, etc.)
It's a good way to do research	It's easier to use than other alternatives (e.g., reading news, going to shopping)	I just like to surf the Internet	To express my opinions, feelings and attitudes freely	To buy foreign products (e.g., plane tickets at Easy Jet site, books at amazon.com)
To learn about useful things	It's convenient to use	It's enjoyable	To meet people with my interests	For e-banking
To follow national and international news	I can use it anytime, anywhere	It's entertaining	To gain business contacts	

The second part of the questionnaire referred to the participants' frequency of usage of various online formats. The study addressed six types of Internet formats: websites, emails, chats, blogs, social networking websites and Internet shops. It was considered that websites and emails are omnipresent online formats, whereas the other formats are correlated with specific users' motives. Respondents assessed how often they frequent particular format on the Likert seven-point scale (1 – "Several times a day", 2 – "Daily", 3 – "Once every 3 days", 4 – "Weekly", 5 – "Monthly", 6 – "Less than once in a month", and 7 – "Never").

■ Results

The first research question hypothesized that the frequency of usage of different online formats is stipulated by a person's dominant motivation for Internet use. Understanding that individuals are usually driven by several motivations for the Internet usage, but also acknowledging the fact that they tend to obtain one specific gratification at a time, we obtained user's dominant motive by ranking the means (since 3 motives were evaluated by 4 items and 2 motives were evaluated by 3 items) of each of the motivations (information, entertainment, convenience, socialization and economic) for each of the respondents. It was ascertained that the information ($M=4.81$, $SD=0.61$) was the primary motive for 175 respondents (out of 228), convenience ($M=4.15$, $SD=0.85$) for 55, entertainment ($M=3.48$, $SD=1.04$)

for 23, socialization (M=2.99, SD=0.94) for just 1, and making of economic transactions (M=2.00, SD=1.06) for 2 respondents.

Provided that we were interested in finding the exact primary motive for each of the participants, and that in the case of 42 respondents that was rather vague (the means of two or three motives were equal) we decided to exclude them from further analysis. In addition, it is noteworthy that only 1 or 2 respondents expressed to be principally led by social and economic drivers, hence due to their insignificant influence they were also omitted from the subsequent examination. At this instance, the sample included 183 units, 131 dominantly motivated by information, 15 by entertainment and 37 by convenience.

The One-way MANOVA was conducted to determine the effect of dominant Internet use motivation on the frequency of the utilization of six online formats, namely: websites, emails, chats, blogs, social networking websites and Internet shops. Results suggested that individual's principal motivation for the Internet use did not statistically significantly affect the frequency of employment of different Internet formats ($F(12, 340) = 1.404$, $p=0.162$; Wilk's $\lambda = 0.908$, partial $\epsilon^2=0.047$).

In order to investigate second research hypothesis, stating that the frequency of the usage of the specific Internet format depends on the intensity of user's dominant motivation (that corresponds to the distinctive character of the subject Internet format), Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the relevant variables, as reported in table 2. In this case the total sample of 228 respondents was used.

Notwithstanding all statistically significant results, several findings drew our attention: (1) It should be noted that economic motivation is highly correlated with the visit to Internet shop – higher scores for this motivation understand more frequent visits to the online shops; (2) Individuals strongly driven by entertainment tend to use online social media (chats, blogs, social networking websites – Web 2.0 applications and emails) frequently; and (3) convenience motivation has not been statistically significant correlated to the frequency of usage of any of the studied Internet formats.

In the third hypothesis it was assumed that the frequency of use of different online formats varies across the genders. For that purpose we ran Independent-Samples T test and found that females use websites statistically significantly more seldom (M=4.31, SD=1.444) than males (M=3.48, SD=1.295), $t(221)=-4.056$, $p=0.000$. Furthermore, results of the T-

test also indicated that males frequented online shops ($M=5.41$, $SD=1.695$) more often compared to females ($M=5.99$, $SD=1.266$), $t(100.188)=-2.546$, $p=0.012$, which was fairly surprising.

Table 2: Pearson correlation coefficients between the level of specific motive and Internet format

<i>Format</i>		<i>Information</i>	<i>Socialization</i>	<i>Convenience</i>	<i>Entertainment</i>	<i>Economic</i>
<i>Websites</i>	Pearson correlation	-.159 (*)	-.097	-.067	-.043	-.182
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.150	.319	.522	.006
<i>Chats</i>	Pearson correlation	-.025	-.192 (*)	.077	-.276 (**)	-.081
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.711	.004	.248	.000	.227
<i>Blogs</i>	Pearson correlation	-.175 (*)	-.248 (**)	-.099	-.259 (**)	-.135 (*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.000	.137	.000	.042
<i>Emails</i>	Pearson correlation	-.132 (*)	-.148 (*)	-.127	-.210 (*)	-.156 (*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.025	.055	.001	.018
<i>Social networking websites</i>	Pearson correlation	-.132 (*)	-.148 (*)	-.127	-.210 (*)	-.156 (*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.047	.025	.055	.001	.018
<i>Internet shops</i>	Pearson correlation	-.070	-.062	-.056	-.028	-.428 (**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.294	.348	.399	.679	.000

(*) Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); (**) Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

■ Discussion and conclusions

The main objective of this research was to help better understanding of the factors that influence user's disposition to use different Internet formats more actively, and in these terms to offer some insights on the possible ways to select the most appropriate formats for communication with the target audience, according to the representative user's characteristics – motivation and gender, more precisely.

Firstly, it was established that a person's kind of dominant motivation for the Internet use, has not affected how often an individual would use the specific Internet format. Even though that could be anticipated for websites and emails, the common Internet formats widely spread among users, it was

expected that this would not be a case with regard to other formats – blogs, chats, social networking websites (Web 2.0 applications) and Internet shops. One explanation for this result could be found in the fact that respondents are primarily driven by information, entertainment and convenience motivation; while studied Internet formats are not significantly different by these attributes. However, it was assumed that convenience motivation would be relevant for the frequency of visit to Internet shops, but this was not established. The thorough inspection of the data reveals that respondents visit Internet shops quite rarely ($M=5.82$, $SD=1.42$), less than once a month on average, which could be interpreted by objective reasons – scarcity of domestic Internet shops and limited possibilities for buying in the international Web shops, due to unwillingness of many popular e-retailers to ship products to Serbia, high shipping costs and lack of the variety of payment methods (e.g., Paypal system has not been introduced in Serbia yet). Hence, it could be reasonable to conclude that the objective reasons, rather than subjective – such as motivation, influence a person's readiness to use a specific Internet format more often.

The results obtained in the testing of the second hypothesis suggested some useful implications. It could be observed that the intensity of a respondent's information motivation was relevant for the frequent utilization of all of the investigated formats, beside chats and Internet shops. It could indicate that these two formats are not perceived as informative by the users, nevertheless, some further research on this matter should be undertaken. The intensity of convenience motivation was proved to be irrelevant for the frequency of the usage of all Internet formats, which is quite unexpected, given that it was a dominant motive for the Internet use for 37 respondents. However, with regard to emails and social networking websites, the calculated values ($r=-0.127$, $p=0.055$ in both cases) indicate that the convenience motivation is relevant to some extent. Moreover, socialization and entertainment were significant for the amount of use of online social formats. Users who are stronger driven by these two motivations tend to use these formats more frequently. It could be advocated that users visit some online contents in order to accomplish social interaction and entertainment simultaneously. This conclusion might imply that ads featured on social media should be more amusing than informative by their nature in order to induce better effects.

Finally, economic motivation showed to be important for usage frequency of blogs, social networking websites and Internet shops. The explanation for the correlation between economic motives and the first two foregoing formats could be found in the fact that many users consult experiences of

other consumers, through social media, before they decide on purchasing of some product. Even though there is a lack of these formats provided in Serbian at the moment, they are emerging rapidly, therefore it is of crucial importance for all companies to define and manage their communications on these channels in the future. The correlation between economic motivation and Internet shops was strong and direct, as expected.

Final hypothesis revealed that males and females do not use Internet shops and websites in the same extent. It appears that males access the Internet weekly, in average, while females do the same less than weekly, which was partially supported by findings of the study conducted on the general Serbian population (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia). This finding may lead to the conclusion that in the short run visual characteristics of Serbian Internet shops should be more adjusted to the preferences of males. However, in the long run, marketers should make more efforts to stimulate online shopping by females. There were not statistically significant differences in usage of online social formats across the genders, which was consistent with the findings of some previous studies (THAYER & RAY, 2006).

In conclusion, some limitations of the present study should be mentioned also. There are some results that have not been in compliance with the findings of some previous studies on these matters. Moreover, it would be interesting to investigate why the frequency of usage of some studied online formats has not differed by the person's dominant motive for the Internet use, particularly for the convenience motivation. These findings might vary with respect to the age of investigated respondents. In addition, it should be borne in mind that this was a qualitative study, with a non-random sampling procedure; consequently more general conclusions could be drawn by applying probability sampling procedure. Finally, it has to be noted that there was a lack of gender balanced sample, due to the general population structure at the University where the study was undertaken, which could affect observations made with regard to the third hypothesis. In spite of its limitations, the presented research is believed to be a valuable benchmark for future researchers who may be interested in the study of comparison of different Internet formats utilization, according to users' primary motivations. Provided that these formats compete for user's time spent online, it would be fruitful to consider why a user chooses to use some formats more frequently than others; and based on that, marketers should decide where to position their ads in order to achieve the most effective results.

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