AN INVESTIGATION OF LINKEDIN USERS: SOCIAL MEDIA USE INTEGRATION, ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATIONS

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The wide variety of social networking sites (SNSs) available today provide different functions for their members. For example, Facebook was originally planned for personal social networking whereas LinkedIn is aimed at professional networking. As social networking has grown, so has research on SNSs. An abundance of studies on the world's largest SNS, Facebook, is available across various disciplines. However, research on LinkedIn is less prolific and topics include its usability, network distance in people search, LinkedIn as an educational tool, and the effect of self-endorsement in advertising on LinkedIn. A literature review also revealed a lack of studies on LinkedIn in South Africa. Additionally, no research on LinkedIn examined social media use integration (SMUI), which refers to the manner in which social media forms an integral part of users' lives and the emotional connection users hold towards social media. SMUI comprises two dimensions: social integration and emotional connection (SIEC), and integration into social routines (ISR).

The main purpose of this study was to compose a profile of LinkedIn users with specific focus on social media use integration, attitudes and motivations. Data was collected through a structured self-completion questionnaire distributed amongst conveniently selected LinkedIn users in Gauteng. Measures were taken from literature and all were reliable at Cronbach's alpha levels of 0.7 or more (measured on five-point Likert-type scales).

The results for the two dimensions of SMUI (SIEC, M=2.47 and ISR, M=3.4) indicate that the respondents do not feel emotionally attached to the platform, and that it only plays a small role in terms of integration into the respondents' typical routines. Thus LinkedIn does not seem to be a very important part of the respondents' daily lives. As LinkedIn is a professional network, its main aim is not the support of personal social relationships, thus these findings seem appropriate as emotional attachment is not considered pertinent in professional contexts.

Despite the seemingly low prominence of the platform in the lives of the respondents, their attitude towards LinkedIn is positive (M=3.8). This suggests that the respondents do see some utility in using the platform. As for motivational factors, slightly positive scores for information-seeking (M=3.5) and surveillance (M=3.5) suggest that LinkedIn is used for these reasons. Thus being able to find useful information and also to keep abreast of current events in the professional environment support the use of LinkedIn. The low level of interpersonal utility (M=1.8) signifies that LinkedIn is not regularly used for building and maintaining personal relationships, which are important aspects of networking. This is concerning from a platform point of view as the main focus of LinkedIn is to develop and maintain networks. Effort should be made to improve the content offered on the platform and to educate members on the benefits of utilising LinkedIn for professional networking. The networking aspect could further be used as a starting point to draw users into using a wider variety of functionalities on LinkedIn. LinkedIn could study the effectiveness of its current functionalities to determine where improvements may be made, which may result in more use of the platform.