Social Network Sites Migrants: A Comprehensive Model of Social Network Sites Switching Intention

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Abstract
Consumer switching Intention, which is the strong predictor of Consumer switching Behavior, has always been an important criterion in marketing literature. Recently, this criterion is adapted to IS discipline to explain customers' switching Intentions under the context of Internet services, including blog, online gaming and Social Network Sites (SNSs). For IS researchers, the importance of this recently emerged concept is increasing because of the rapid growth of micro-bloggers and SNSs users and constantly improving variety in the portfolio of options for cyber service providers. This article goes through a comprehensive literature review for consumer switching behavior researches under multiple disciplines in order to provide a unified theory framework adapted from push-pull-mooring model of migration literature to thoroughly investigate Social Network Sites (SNSs) users' intention to switch between SNSs. I believe this framework will provide insights for both IS researchers and SNSs practitioners.

1. Introduction
Currently, I are embracing an era with rapid growth of Web 2.0 application, among which the most popular and influential are Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, LinkedIn and most recently, Google+ allowing individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with strangers and/or acquaintances (Ellison et al. 2007). Along with the phenomenal increasing of the number of SNSs, competitions among different SNSs are more and more intense. The most famous example is the competition between Facebook and Myspace. Facebook and Myspace are two SNSs with very similar launch date (i.e., February 2004 and August 2003) and target customers, which are mainly college students. After Facebook launched, its daily reach had been steadily increasing while that of Myspace had been constantly declining, and on April 19, 2008, the daily reach of Facebook surpassed that of Myspace, which means Facebook overtakes Myspace as the most popular SNS all worldwide (Mack 2008).

Because of the fierce competitions among SNSs, SNSs users’ switching behavior can have a significant impact on the online social networking (OSN) service providers, therefore it’s crucial to understand why customers switch OSN service providers (Bansal et al. 2005). Recently, more and more IS researchers began to investigate individuals’ switching under cyber space (e.g., Cheng et al. 2009; Hou et al. 2009; Kim et al. 2006; Zhang et al. 2008). However, a comprehensive framework for cyber service switching is still lacking, especially for user’s intentions to switch SNS. As a result, this paper will at first review the theoretical background of switching behavior research in multiple disciplines; and then propose my own theoretical framework, which is built based on the push-pull-mooring model of migration literature, to study SNSs users’ intentions to switch SNSs along with corresponding hypotheses. At last, this paper will be concluded with intended theoretical and practical contributions and implications.

2. Literature review
Keaveney (1995), set the foundation for customers’ switching behavior in service industries by comprehensively exploring potential factors, which can affect customers’ switching behavior especially for service providers and categorizing these factors into 8 categories (i.e., pricing, inconvenience, core service failure, service encounter failure, response to service failure, competition, ethical problems and involuntary switching). In addition, Keaveney (1995) included possible post-switching behavior (i.e., word of mouth about service switching and search for new service) into his research model.

Bansal and Taylor (1999), however, developed a new theory, which is named “Service Provider Switching Model (SPSM)”, based on the perspective of Ajzen (1991)’s Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to investigate customers’ switching behavior. TPB described the strong correlation between behavioral
intention and the actual behavior, along with the relationships between attitude towards behavior and behavioral intention, subjective norms and behavioral intention, and perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention. SPSM expands TPB by adding satisfaction as the antecedent of switching intention and chose perceived switching cost to represent perceived behavior control (Bansal and Taylor 1999). Moreover, service quality and perceived relevance are introduced as antecedents of attitude and the former construct is treated as the antecedents of satisfaction (Bansal and Taylor 1999).

After that, Bansal et al. (2005) adapted the PPM model of migration from migration literature to explain customers’ service switching behavior and provided the empirical evidence to prove that this model can explain the most variance in switching intentions. The better prediction power of PPM mainly comes from the moderation effect of mooring factors and the introduction of pull factors compared with previous theories (Bansal et al. 2005).

The PPM model is based on Ravenstein’s “Law of Migration,” which is presented to the Royal Statistical Society in 1885. After that, according to Lewis (1982), HerBerle declared the distinction between push and pull factors. Jackson (1986) argued that this push-pull paradigm is the most theoretical contributive in the migration literature. According to this model, the push factors represent the negative factors at the origin that drive people away and the pull factors, on the other hand, represent the positive factors at the destination, that attract people (Lewis, 1982). Except for aggregating push and pull factors in early migration studies, Lee (1966) introduced “intervening obstacles” in the pull-push model because of the importance of normative and psychosocial variables in migration decision making (Germani 1965) since individuals’ evaluation of push and pull factors is not independent of their personal or social context. However, the concept of “intervening obstacles” only focuses on the inhibiting aspect of the intervening variables, while their facilitating aspect is overlooked (Jackson 1986). Therefore, Moon (1995) incorporated the “moorings” notion, which was introduced by Longino (1992), into the push-pull paradigm to incorporate both inhibiting and facilitating aspects of intervening variables and created PPM model.

As described previously, PPM model has a pretty strong prediction power not only in geographical migration study, but also in individuals’ switching behaviors research (Bansal et al. 2005). The main reason is due to the similarity shared between the geographical migration and switching behavior because “migration”, which is defined as “the movement of a person (a migrant) between two places for a certain period of time” (Boyle et al. 1998), can precisely describe an individual’s switching behavior between two services providers. Recently, PPM is adopted in IS research to explain individuals’ switching behaviors among cyber services providers (e.g., Cheng et al. 2009 on switching among SNSs; Hou et al. 2009 on switching among online games; Zhang et al. 2008 on switching among blogs) and this particular category of behaviors is defined as “cyber migration” by Cheng et al. (2009). Nevertheless, these 3 papers on cyber migration show inconsistent empirical results. For instance, Cheng et al. find that mooring factors have no significant effect on the switching intention while both Hou et al. (2009) and Zhang et al. (2008) report significant relation between moorings and switching intention. Moreover, according to Hou et al. (2009), push factors have no significant effect on the switching intention but either Cheng et al. (2009) or Zhang et al. (2008) report that push factors have significant effect on switching intention. Despite the slight difference in research context, the inconsistent results hint potential moderation effect of mooring, based on literature, being overlooked. Besides, more research needs to be done to further investigate and categorize the mooring factors because some of them should be contextual factors, which should have moderation effect rather than direct effect on switching intention, and the others should directly affect the criterion.

In summary, because of the phenomenal predicting power of PPM in cyber migration and the research gap existed in the role and effect of mooring factors, the present study will adapt PPM to explain individuals’ switching behaviors for SNSs and provide a more comprehensive and reliable PPM, by incorporating more mooring factors and categorizing them to contribute to the IS theory.

3. Research Model and Hypotheses

Our research model is depicted in Figure 1, in which the construct switching intention for SNSs is treated as the criterion since switching intention is repetitively reported as strong predictor of switching behavior. Among the 4 multi-dimensional constructs, satisfaction represents the push factors, attraction represents the pull factors and contextual constrains and personal factors constitute the mooring factors in PPM. All the specific definitions and hypotheses will be addressed in the following sections.

3.1. SNSs Switching Intentions

Switching intention for varies cyber services has been repetitively applied by many IS literatures as criterion,
such as email services switching intention (Kim et al. 2006), blog services switching behaviors (Zhang et al. 2008) online games switching intention (Hou et al. 2009), and SNSs switching intention (Cheng et al. 2009) to study different switching behaviors. Moreover, Bansal et al. (2005) reported the significant relation between services switching intention and the actual service switching behavior. Therefore, in order to investigate individuals’ SNSs switching behaviors, the present study applies SNSs switching intention as the criterion of the research model.

3.2. Push Factor

Push factors are the presumably negative factors of the original place that drive individuals away from it (service providers) (Moon, 1995). Bansal et al. (2005) adopt all important push factors from migration literature to service providers switching behavior, including satisfaction, perceived quality, perceived value, trust, commitment, and price perceptions. However, among these constructs, satisfaction/dissatisfaction can already well describe and reflect the customers’ perceptions and judgments of other constructs, which describes the characteristics of the origin, such as quality and value, except for trust and commitment, because satisfaction is defined as “the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer’s prior feelings about the consumption experience” (Oliver 1981). Moreover, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with varies factors at origin is also the emphasized construct in migration literature (De Jong and Faw 1981). Besides, the negative relation between satisfaction with the service provider and switching intentions is empirically tested in service literature (Bansal and Taylor 1999; Cronin et al. 2000). In marketing literature, it was repetitively reported that satisfaction positively affects customers’ repurchase intention, which is the exact opposite of switching intention (Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Oliver 1993; Szymanski and Henard 2001). Similar conclusion has been confirmed in IS literature as well that satisfaction is the important antecedent of continuance intention (Bhattacherjee 2001), customers’ loyalty (Chiu 2004), and customer relationships building (Wang and Head, 2007). In a similar vein, dissatisfaction was reported to lead to the dissolution of the customer-retailer relationship (Ping 1993).

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Figure 1. The research framework
users’ evaluations of 4 important characteristics of SNSs, including satisfaction with technical quality, satisfaction with information quality, satisfaction with community support, and satisfaction with member policy.

The satisfaction with technical quality can be defined as SNSs users’ degree of satisfaction with the quality of the infrastructures of the SNSs, including speed of downloading, navigation structure, degree of user friendly and richness of application (Cheng et al. 2009). While users’ satisfaction with information quality can be defined as SNSs users’ degree of satisfaction with the quality of the information provided by the SNSs, such as the reliability, form and amount of information provided (Cheng et al. 2009). Cheng et al. (2009) defined satisfaction with community support as SNSs users’ degree of satisfaction with support provided by SNSs in order to help users to better utilize the functions of SNSs, like connecting to their friends. At last, satisfaction with membership policy refers to SNSs users’ degree of satisfaction with the regulations constituted by SNSs, which they are required to adhere to (Cheng et al. 2009). These 4 dimensions can well capture users’ satisfaction with the important characteristics of SNSs so they are adapted to the present study as the push factors of SNSs switching behavior.

Exception for these 4 dimensions of satisfaction illustrated above, users’ perceptions of the value of SNSs can also be a push factor. Value has been suggested as a direct determinant of service switching in marketing literature (e.g., Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002). Zeithaml (1988) defined value as customers’ perceptions of the tradeoff between benefits and costs of maintaining an ongoing relationship with a service provider. In this study, the benefits can be defined as intrinsic and extrinsic utility provided by SNSs usage (Gwinner et al. 1998; Neal and Bathe 1997), while the costs refer to the time or effort spent in using a particular SNS (Zeithaml 1988). Therefore, if a SNS user perceives high value in the currently using SNS, he/she will less likely switch to other SNSs, which means breaking up the ongoing relationship with the current SNS provider, even when push or pull effects exist. As a result, SNSs users’ perceived value is posited as a mooring factor of their SNSs switching intentions.

Trust should also be incorporated as one of the push factors. According to Ricgmond (1988), pointed out that one individuals’ trust in his or her relationships with others is a push factor. In the present context, trust can be defined as customers’ feelings that a service provider will fulfill promises (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Trust is the proved to be the antecedent of customers’ behavioral intentions to return to a service provider (e.g., Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Genfer et al. 2003). Thus, low trust will lead to individuals switching intentions (Bansal et al. 2005). As a result, I posit trust as one of the push factors of SNSs switching intentions.

At last, the previous studied predictor of service-switching predictor commitment should also be included in the present research model as push factors. Commitment is defined as a customers’ belief that an ongoing relationship is worth investing in according to Sharma and Patterson (2000). It is the strong predictor of repurchase intention (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2002) so low commitment can lead to customers’ switching intention. As a result, I posit commitment as the push factor of SNSs switching intention.

In summary, hypothesis 1 of this study is proposed as:

Hypothesis 1: A user’s satisfaction with technical quality, satisfaction with information quality, satisfaction with community support, satisfaction with member policy, perceived value, trust and commitment are negatively associated with his/her intention to switch to another SNS.

3.3. Pull Factors

Pull factors are the presumably positive factors of the destination that draw migrants towards it (Moon, 1995). Similar to push factors, pull factors represent the characteristics of the destination, or, under present context, SNSs, instead of migrants’ personal and contextual variables. The only construct existed in service and migration literature which can represent the concept of pull factor is alternative attractiveness according to Bansal et al. (2005). According to Jones et al. (2000), alternative attractiveness refers to the positive attributes of competing service providers. Moreover, the previous literature provided plenty of evidences of the positive correlation between alternative attractiveness (or attractive alternativeness) and customers’ switching intentions (e.g., Anderson et al. 1994; Bansal et al. 2005; Gwinner 1998; Keaveney 1995; Kim et al. 2006; Rusbult and Farrell 1983) and many recent papers in IS field reported positive association between the attractiveness of alternative cyber services providers and users’ switching intention (Cheng et al. 2009; Hou et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2009). As a result, for the present study, I propose that the attractiveness of alternative SNSs positively affect users’ intentions to switch to an alternative SNS as pull factor.

Because of the unique characteristics of SNSs, the users or communities in a SNS are equally or even more important compared to the attractiveness of its own advantageous characteristics when spurring new switchers; since the main design goal and main function of a SNS is to let users connecting and interacting with each other to build social networks and communities in
this SNS. Word-of-mouth is defined as “informing others about new products (diffusion of innovations) rather than consumer communications about existing products” (Richins 1983). Word-of-mouth is a strong predictor of customer’s patronizing behavior to a firm (Lundeen et al., 1995; Zeithaml et al., 1993), thus, it is proved to be the predictor of the brand switching behavior and can help a firm in gaining new customers (Maxham III, 2001). As a result, besides from the attractiveness of competing SNS per se, its users’ or communities’ word-of-mouth should also be introduced as an additional pull factor. Therefore, I posit hypothesis 2 as below:

Hypothesis 2: The alternative attractiveness of competing SNSs and the word-of-mouth of competing SNSs’ users are positively associated with users’ intentions to switch SNSs.

3.4. Mooring Factors

As emphasized by Boyle et al. (1998), “Any simple comparison between push and pull factors is complicated by the presence of intervening opportunities—obstacles such as family obligations at the origin or the high cost of moving, which may prevent migration occurring” (p. 64). Therefore, it’s important to consider the contextual or situational constrains in addition to the push-pull paradigm (Lee 1966). Bansal et al. (2005) summarized 5 mooring factors from the service and brand switching literature, including switching costs, social influences, attitudes toward switching, past switching behaviors, and variety-seeking tendencies, and these mooring factors negatively affect customers’ switching intentions and negatively moderate the relation between push factors and their intentions to switch service providers and the relation between pull factors and their intentions to switch service providers.

In migration literature, switching costs (including time and moving costs) associated with the migration behavior (Gardner 1981; Lee 1966). Adapted from migration literature, financial, time, effort, and ability switching costs have been empirically studied in service literature as the antecedents of switching intentions (e.g., Bolton, et al. 2000; Jones et al. 2000). Jones et al. (2002) suggested 3 dimensions of switching costs, which are continuity costs, learning costs, and sunk costs, and they all have a positive relation with customers’ repurchase intention. Among those 3 dimensions, continuity costs refer to the lost benefits and opportunities after switching services; learning costs refer to the effort in locating and learning how the use the new service provider; and sunk costs refer to customers’ invested time or efforts in using the previous service (Jones et al. 2002). The detering effect of switching cost to switching intentions is well documented in literatures of different disciplines (e.g., Bansal et al. 2005; Bolton et al. 2000; Cheng et al. 2009; Jones et al. 2000; Zhang et al. 2008). Therefore I posit that there is a negative relation between the switching costs and SNSs users’ switching intentions.

Despite for the direct effect of switching cost on switching intentions, it should be applied as contextual constrains should affect the relationship between push and pull factors, thus contextual constrains should affect the relationship between push and pull factors and the migrants’ switching intention. Bansal et al. (2005) also provided empirical evidences to prove that switching costs, as contextual constrains, moderate the relation between push factors and customers’ intention to switch service providers. As a result, in the present study, I propose that switching cost moderate the relation between push factors and users’ intentions to switch SNSs and that between pull factors and users’ intentions to switch SNSs as a mooring factor.

Social influence should be included as another contextual constrains of the SNS switching intention. Social influence is the strong predictor of “we-intention” (Bagozzi and Lee 2002), which is defined as “a commitment of an individual to participate in joint action and involves an implicit or explicit agreement between the participants to engage in that joint action” (Tuomela 1995, p9.). Since, “we-intention” can well capture the collective behavioral intentions in SNSs, such as using a SNS with my friends together and communicating with each other, social influence should be a strong antecedent of continuous SNSs use (Cheung et al. 2011; Cheung and Lee 2010). Therefore, social influence should pose an inhibitive barrier to SNS migrants’ intentions to switch SNS when encountering push or pull factors. The 3 dimensions of social influence and there relations with switching intention will be discussed in detail in following sections.

In migration literature, normative concerns are considered as constrains of migration behavior (Gardner 1981). As one dimension of social influence, subjective norms, also being conceptually referred as compliance, represent an individual’s compliance to significant others to gain favorable reactions (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Bagozzi, R. P 2002). In migration literature, Desbarats (1983) argued that subjective norms should be introduced into the model of migration decision. After adapting PPM to study customers’ intentions to switch service providers, Bansal et al. (2005) provided empirical evidence to prove that subjective norms should be added into PPM as mooring factors.

As another dimension of social influence, group norm, or internalization, is defined as the “shared values or goals, as perceived by a decision maker, between oneself
and members of the group” (Bagozzi and Lee 2002, p231.). If an individual perceived that the members of a group share the similar value or goals, he/she is not only willing to join in this social group, but also engage to similar activities as other members (Kelman 1958; Bagozzi and Lee 2002). Therefore, if one user is affected by a strong group norm in his/her social networks in original SNS, he/she will less likely switch his/her current SNS even under the influence of push or pull factors.

The last dimension of social influence is social identity, which is defined as “self-awareness of his/her membership in a group and through the emotional and evaluative significance of this membership” (Tajfel 1978). Ellemers et al. (1999) specified 3 dimensions for social identity, which including “a cognitive component (a cognitive awareness of one’s membership in a social group—self-categorization), an evaluative component (a positive and negative value connotation attached to this group membership—group self-esteem), and an emotional component (a sense of emotional involvement with the group—affective commitment). Many articles repetitively identified the positive relation between social identities and in-group favoritism (Bagozzi and Lee 2002; Ellemers et al. 1999; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000).

As a result, users’ social identities are positively associated with their intentions to continuously participate in their virtual communities in the original SNSs they are using (Cheung et al. 2010; Cheung and Lee 2011). Therefore, social identities should deter the effect of push and pull factors on SNSs switching intentions and reduce users’ intentions to switch SNSs.

In summary, I posit social influence as one mooring factor of SNS switching intentions.

The concept perceived justice is derived from the equity theory (Adams 1965), which suggests individuals will go through the motivational and cognitive processes of evaluating justice inputs against justice outputs, based on other individuals’ experience in similar situations (Greenberg 1990). Equity theory is a powerful framework for explaining customers’ satisfaction and repatronage intentions because low quality of service or even service failure will make consumers perceive inequity, or perceive lower justice, while fair recovery efforts of service providers will increase customers’ perceived justice (Maxham III 2001). Based on this argument, high perceived justice should reduce the effect of push and pull factors on switching intentions and decrease the switching intentions as well. As a result, I posit perceived justice as one mooring factor of SNSs switching intentions.

Attitude towards switching can also be included as mooring factor. In migration literatures, migrants’ attitudes toward migration are argued to affect their migration intentions (Desbarats 1983). Attitude towards switching is reported as strong predictor of switching behavior (Bansal and Taylor 2002). Bansal et al. (2005) also provided empirical evidences to prove that Attitude towards switching is one mooring factor of consumers’ switching behavior so that it moderates the push-switching intention and pull-switching intention relations and positively associate with switching intention. As a result, I propose that Attitude towards switching should be treated as mooring factor of SNSs switching intentions.

Variety seeking should also be added as mooring factor because individuals’ preferences are influenced by their propensity for variety seeking (Lattin and McAlister 1985). Bansal et al. (2005) empirically tested the moderation effect and direct effect of variety seeking on switching intentions. The role of variety seeking is very important among all the mooring factors because it captures individuals’ personal factors; and because the role of moorings is to represent the intervening factors, which will either facilitate or inhibit individuals’ react to push and pull factors, personal factors should be introduced as strong predictors for these intervening effects. Karn (1995) summarized 3 motivating factors for variety seeking, which are external situation (consumers’ response to the external environment changes), satiation/stimulation (individuals’ reactions to attributes of stimulus), and reference uncertainty (consumers’ uncertainty of future tastes, which can be diminished by creating a portfolio of options). Those 3 categories of motivation will lead to individuals’ variety seeking behavior, which, in the present study, means the SNSs users will seek for other optional SNSs to fulfill their internal needs for variety, and then will interfere the effect of push and pull factors on SNSs switching intentions and at the same time increase SNSs users’ intentions to switch SNSs (Karn 1995). As a result, I posit variety seeking as one of the mooring factors of SNSs switching intentions.

The last mooring factor is inertia, which represents SNSs users’ habit strength to engage in their SNSs switching behavior. As Lattin and McAlister (1985) pointed out, individuals’ references are indeed influenced by their past consumption histories. According to this conclusion, Ganesh et al. (2000) suggested customers’ switching intentions are influenced by their past switching behaviors. Moreover, Bansal et al. (2005) empirically proved that the frequency of customers’ prior switching behavior should be one mooring factor of their intentions to switch service providers. Since the frequency of customers’ past switching behaviors can be referred to by inertia in the present study, therefore I posit SNSs users’ inertia as the last mooring factor of their intentions to switch SNSs.
In conclusion, hypothesis 3, 4 and 5 will be proposed as:

Hypothesis 3: Switching cost, social influences, perceived justice, unfavorable attitude towards switching, infrequent variety seeking, and low inertia are negatively associated with users’ intentions to switch SNSs.

Hypothesis 4: Switching cost, social influences, perceived justice, unfavorable attitude towards switching, infrequent variety seeking, and low inertia negatively moderate the relation between push factors and users’ intentions to switch SNSs.

Hypothesis 5: Switching cost, social influences, perceived justice, unfavorable attitude towards switching, infrequent variety seeking, and low inertia negatively moderate the relation between pull factors and users’ intentions to switch SNSs.

4. Intended contributions

This paper intended to contribute the IS literature by adapting a comprehensive PPM framework from migration literature to investigate SNS users’ intentions to switch SNS service providers, and Expend it by adapting satisfactions of SNSs related characteristics as push factors, adding both social influence of the social network in original SNS and perceived justice from equity theory as mooring factors, and introducing word-of-mouth as pull factors. Thus the PPM framework proposed by this paper can provide a solid foundation for studying not only individuals’ intentions to switch SNSs, but also other cyber migration phenomenon.

For SNS practitioners, this paper can provide insights about how to deterring their customers’ intentions to switch to their competing SNS, including, first, improve varies qualities or values of the SNS; second, response to service failures or customers’ complaints with fair recovery efforts; third, help users built a intimate and engaging virtual community so that they will be bond to their original SNS. Besides, SNSs practitioners can also attract new users by providing more attractions such as more unique functionalities or better quality; or promoting more positive word-or-mouth.

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