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The Needs–Affordances Features (NAF) Perspective
for the Use of Social Media

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Abstract

The paper develops a needs–affordances features (NAF) perspective on what motivates individuals' use of social media. We suggest that social media applications have affordances that can fulfill certain psychological needs and that individuals are motivated to use these applications to fulfill their psychological needs. Our theoretical development builds upon two psychological theories, namely self-determination and psychological ownership, to identify five psychological needs (needs for autonomy, relatedness, competence, having a place, and self-identity), that we posit are particularly pertinent to social media use. According to NAF, these psychological needs will motivate use of those social media applications that have salient affordances to fulfill these psychological needs. We identify such affordances through a comprehensive review of the literature and of social media applications and put forth propositions that map the affordances to the psychological needs that they fulfill. Our theory development generates important implications. First, it has implications for social media research in that it provides an overarching comprehensive framework for the affordances of social media as a whole and the related psychological needs that motivate their use. Future studies can leverage NAF to identify psychological needs motivating use of specific social media sites based on the affordances the sites provide, and design science research can leverage NAF in the design and bundling of specific social media features to engage users. Second, it has implications for technology acceptance research in that NAF can enrich existing models by opening up the mechanisms through which psychological needs influence user perceptions and various behaviors. Finally, NAF provides a new lens and common vocabulary for future studies, which we hope can stimulate cumulative research endeavors to develop a comprehensive framework of information systems affordances in general and the psychological needs that information systems satisfy.

Keywords: Social media, psychological needs, affordances, technology acceptance, technology use, system use, self-determination, psychological ownership, autonomy, relatedness, self-identity, identity, motivation