WHEN EMOTIONS GO SOCIAL – UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN SOCIAL NETWORK USE

Research in Progress

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Abstract

Information systems (IS) research has shown that there is a vast array of motivators and reasons for using social networking sites. Nonetheless, emotional intelligence (EI) has for the most part been neglected by IS-research outside the organizational context. We therefore introduce the concept of EI to social media research and adopt a measurement model. We derive a hypothesis from literature and conduct a survey-based pre-study to investigate the relationship between EI and Facebook use. While our initial hypothesis – indicating a positive relationship between EI and an individual's Facebook use – cannot be confirmed, we discovered a heterogeneity in our sample that left us with two subgroups. Our analysis shows that those groups display contrasting relationships between EI and Facebook use that should be investigated further. We contribute to theory by applying the concept of EI in a social media context as well as uncovering a relationship between EI and social network use. Our research results also have practical implications for social network design and social media marketing.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Social media use, Social networks, Facebook.

1 Introduction

Social media are among the most popular internet services globally (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012) and transform many aspects of social interaction in modern society (Ellison and boyd, 2013). They enable users to create and exchange content with others (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61), are ubiquitous (Brooks, 2015, p. 27), and are of central importance in users' lives (Vannucci et al., 2017, p. 163). The constant growth in social media users reflects this development. While 0.97 billion users were reported on social networking sites in 2010, there were already 2.8 billion users by 2017 (Statista, 2017). Experts predict further growth in social network users (Banjanin et al., 2015, p. 308) as well as the revenue generated through social network advertising, which amounted to $41 billion in 2017 (Statista, 2018).

Information systems (IS) research has addressed the motivators and reasons behind social network use, such as the need to interact socially with peers (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Lin and Lu, 2011, 2011), the desire for self-presentation or self-disclosure (Banjanin et al., 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), and wanting to experience enjoyment (Lin and Lu, 2011) and improve psychological well-being (Ellison et al., 2007). There are however also negative consequences to this use, such as envy (Krasnova et al., 2013) and anxiety (Woods and Scott, 2016), which can lead to discontinuance of social media use. Continued social media use despite these risks could be tied to emotional intelligence, as the latter moderates the relationship between stress and mental health (Ciarrochi et al., 2002).

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the "adaptive use of emotion-laden information" (Mayer et al., 2003) and forms part of anyone's intelligence. It involves the ability to perceive own and others' emotions (Goleman, 1995), deduce their meaning and purposefully influence thoughts and actions (Rivers et al., 2007). The concept incorporates verbal as well as non-verbal emotional cues (Mayer and Salovey, 1993, p. 433). High EI is linked to better job performance (Goleman, 2001; Wong and Law, 2002) as well as increased leadership skills (Alammar and Pauleen, 2016; George, 2000). EI does not only enhance task performance, but also interaction with others in groups such as teams or departments. Furthermore, EI influences consumer decision-making (Kidwell et al., 2008), making it an interesting subject for practice to examine due to the high volume of social network advertising revenue. Thus, investigating EI in the context of social media use is standing to reason, albeit IS research has yet to conduct according studies, although the possible relevance of EI for IS has been noted (Stokes, 2004).

In IS literature, the role of EI in a social context has been researched with regard to project management and leadership (Allen et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Preston et al., 2015), specific job profiles such as software engineers (Kosti et al., 2014) or service employees (Goel and Hussein, 2015; Lee et al., 2015), and knowledge management (Decker et al., 2009; Geofroy and Evans, 2017). Hence, there is a research gap regarding EI regarding the social context of IS use, specifically social media and social networks. We attempt to commence IS research in this field and propose a research model to examine the role of EI in social network use. We also develop a measurement model and present the results of a pre-study in this research-in-progress paper.

2 Theoretical foundations

In this section, we introduce extant models that conceptualize and operationalize EI in research. We then give a brief overview of social media and social networking sites as our research setting before exploring the role of EI in Facebook use and deriving our research hypothesis.

2.1 Models for emotional intelligence

While there are several models to measure an individual's EI, they can overall be distinguished into two categories: task-based tests and self-reported scales. Task-based tests usually ask a person to solve an emotional problem (Law et al., 2008), evaluating their EI ability. The most recognized model of this type is by Mayer et al. (1999) – the Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS), which was updated in 2000. The scale includes operationalization for perceiving, assimilating, understanding and managing emotions. Emotion perception incorporates recognizing own and others' emotions as well as the ability to express emotions adequately. Emotion assimilation comprises generating emotions to support own reason and actions. Emotion understanding means not only understanding and analyzing, but also recognizing the complex relationships between emotions. Emotion management includes own emotion regulation as well as emotion control in others.

Unlike task-based tests, of which only a few have found their way into research, there are many self-reported EI scales that test trait EI, which is often evaluated within a personality framework (Petrides and Furnham, 2001). The Emotional Quotient Inventory by Bar-On (1998) comprises five scales with 15 subscales, among which are inter- and intrapersonal issues as well as stress management, adaptability, and general mood. Another self-reported model is the Trait Meta-Mood Scale, which includes themes like clarity, attention, and controllability of negative emotions in the subscales (Salovey et al., 1995). These scales can also be used when others are evaluated, such as asking a different person how an individual is perceived to act or react emotionally (Law et al., 2004). Many scales are extensive and require participants to fill out long, detailed, and therefore unpractical questionnaires (some take about 40 minutes to answer) (Bar-On, 1998). To enhance the practicability of self-reported EI scales, Wong and Law (2002) developed a short and psychometrically sound EI measure concurrent with the MEIS dimensions. It tests self-emotion appraisal, appraisal of others' emotion, use of emotions, and regulation of emotion, all of which should be high for a high-EI individual. We use this measure proposed by Wong and Law (2002) in our study due to its superior practicability as well as the ability to reflect EI itself,

which is "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Mayer and Salovey, 1993, p. 433).

2.2 Social media and social networking sites

While there is no universal definition of social media (Constantinides, 2014, p. 41), researchers agree that it comprises (1) the interaction between users (the social part) and (2) the communication channel or instrument (the medium or media) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; O'Brien, 2016). In a broader sense, all online services that let users create and share content count as social media (Bolton et al., 2013, p. 248). More specifically, "social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61).

Social media serves as an umbrella term for many social media instruments, such as social networking sites (SNS), social bookmarking, wikis or weblogs, with many different platforms each (O'Brien, 2016). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 62) classify these instruments according to two dimensions: (1) self-presentation/self-disclosure, which relates to the extent of shared personal information and the ability to control the image created through this information, and (2) social presence/media richness, which relates to intimacy and immediacy in communication to reduce ambiguity.

For our research, only social media platforms with high self-presentation/self-disclosure are eligible, as the desire to control others' impressions of the own presentation is a social aspect (Goffman, 1959) and therefore more likely to be impacted by EI. We also account for social presence, eliminating social media with a low social presence such as weblogs, since the higher this dimension, the clearer and more convincing the communication (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), both of which are attributes of high-EI individuals' communication. This leaves us with SNS as the optimal research environment. While a virtual social world such as Second Life may have more media richness, SNS do not only present an outlet for high self-presentation, but also a relatively high social presence.

SNS are defined as "applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 63). Users often connect with people they know offline through SNSand then retain these contacts (boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Worldwide, there are more than 2 billion active monthly Facebook users as of November 2017 (Noyes, 2017). We therefore chose the largest SNS to date, Facebook, as our study object.

2.3 Emotional intelligence and Facebook use

An IS literature search revealed that EI and social network use are distinct concepts that have not yet been investigated in direct context of each other. This is surprising, as emotions are the primary motivational system for human behavior (Leeper, 1948; Mowrer, 1960). They are a key component of the human experience when interacting socially with other individuals (Norman, 2004). The relation of EI to SNS use can be derived from the influence of EI on knowledge management system use, stress resistance, social acceptance, and social capital.

Emotion-laden knowledge and EI have already proved to increase and enhance the use of knowledge management systems and social software (Decker et al., 2009; Geofroy and Evans, 2017), which have many functionalities in common with social media and SNS. Consequently, high-EI individuals could be more likely to benefit from not only using knowledge management systems, but also SNS, leading to increased use of the latter.

While social media for private and professional use is generally associated with many advantages (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kugler and Smolnik, 2013), the researched downsides of social media use are phenomena such as social overload and fear of rejection. Maier et al. (2012) argue that individuals experience stress due to social overload while using SNS like Facebook. They also found that continued stress and fatigue may lead to discontinued use. Users who experience less stress or are better at coping with stress are more likely to use and continue using Facebook. Ciarrochi et al. (2002) showed that a

high EI is a distinctive factor for improved mental health and stress handling. Hence, stress-resistant high-EI individuals could be more likely to use Facebook and use it more than low-EI individuals.

Yu et al. (2015) claim that fear of rejection by a certain social group is an inhibitor of disclosure on SNS, leading to lower social media use. High EI is correlated with better leadership skills (Alammar and Pauleen, 2016; George, 2000), which are in turn related to less fear of judgement or rejection (Cashman, 2017). Furthermore, Yu et al. (2015) also claim that social acceptance, a prerequisite for leadership skills, leads to more disclosure on and use of SNS. High-EI individuals could therefore be more likely to use SNS and disclose information on them.

Finally, "seeking information via social network sites is a positive and significant predictor of people's social capital" (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012, p. 319), encouraging more social people, who are often more emotionally intelligent, to use SNS. Along with high-EI individuals' increased knowledge management system use, stress resistance, social acceptance, and high social capital, this leads us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis: EI is positively related to SNS (Facebook) use.

3 Research method

3.1 Measures and instrument development

To test our hypothesis, we developed a structured questionnaire for quantitative analysis. We adapted prior measurement scales from literature, and operationalized the construct "Facebook use" by adapting the items based on Venkatesh et al. (2008). Those items are used in various studies, therefore we perceive them as very robust and adaptable. To operationalize EI, we used the items from Wong and Law (2002). They provide a practical operationalization for the four EI categories, assigning four questions to each category, totaling 16 items. Based on the descriptions of Wong and Law (2002), we conceptualized EI as a second-order construct consisting of the four EI dimensions (1) self-emotion appraisal, (2) appraisal of others' emotion, (3) use of emotions, and (4) regulation of emotion. Wong and Law (2002) also state that those dimensions are highly interrelated, therefore we conceptualized EI as a reflective-reflective higher-order construct. Table 1 shows an overview of the derived items.

Additionally, we included the following control variables, as the literature suggests that they might influence our model's dependent variable: We chose the factor "age," as it is mentioned as an influential factor on an individual's degree of Facebook use (Bolton et al., 2013; Correa et al., 2010; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012). There is also research that confirms differences in social media use between male and female users (Correa et al., 2010; Lin and Lu, 2011). Finally, we found research that proves that network size (in our case the number of Facebook friends) is also an important factor when it comes to explaining social media use (Lin and Lu, 2011).

Construct	**Item**	
Facebook use (Use)	Use1	How often do you use Facebook?
	Use2	How would you rate your current extent of Facebook use?
	Use3	How frequently do you use Facebook on average?
Use of emotions (UE)	UE1	I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.
	UE2	I always tell myself I am a competent person.
	UE3	I am a self-motivated person.
	UE4	I would encourage myself to try my best.

Regulation of emotions (RE)	RE1	I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.
	RE2	I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.
	RE3	I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.
	RE4	I have good control of my own emotions.
Self-emotion appraisal (SEA)	SEA1	I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.
	SEA2	I have a good understanding of my own emotions.
	SEA3	I really understand what I feel.
	SEA4	I always know whether or not I am happy.
Others' emotion appraisal (OEA)	OEA1	I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.
	OEA2	I am a good observer of others' emotions.
	OEA3	I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.
	OEA4	I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.

Table 1. Overview of items

3.2 Data collection and sampling strategy

We performed an initial data collection as part of our pre-study. We distributed the survey among colleagues and friends, using a snowball effect. We also distributed the survey in three high school classes to obtain a diverse and representative sample in terms of demographics. We completed the data collection phase with a sample of 105 responses for our pre-study. The sample's average age is 25.53 years and the average number of Facebook friends is 365.97. The gender distribution is 60 female and 44 male participants (one participant did not indicate any gender).

As the data collection served as a basis for our pre-study, we compared the overall population of Facebook users to our sample in order to test the representativeness of our sample. Noyes (2017) states that "age 25 to 34, at 29.7% of users, is the most common age demographic" and the gender distribution is relatively even, with slightly more females than males (for every 66 males, there are 76 females). Regarding the number of Facebook friends, the average number among adult Facebook users is 338 (Guardian, 2014). Based on these data, we can confirm that our sample fits those demographics.

4 Analysis

4.1 Measurement model

We used the partial least squares method of the software SmartPLS 3.0 (Ringle et al., 2015) to estimate the structural model. Partial least squares is a non-parametric approach that demands only modest restrictions regarding sample size and sample distributions (Gefen et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009; Qureshi and Compeau, 2009; Ringle et al., 2012). Thus, PLS is very applicable for the purpose of our pre-study looking at the relatively small sample size.

As EI is conceptualized as a second-order construct, assessing the measurement and structural model varies from single-order PLS-SEM approaches. Hair et al. (2017) describe the two-stage approach for evaluating models that include higher-order constructs: first, we assessed the measurement model of the directly observed indicators from the questionnaire (such as Use and the four EI dimensions) and, second, we used the latent variable scores for the four EI dimensions to assess the higher-order construct as well as the structural model. This approach was developed for reflective-formative and formative-formative higher-order constructs, but Hair et al. (2017) also state the applicability for reflective-reflective higher-order constructs such as EI.

We performed several endeavors to ensure a valid measurement model by following the instructions provided by Hair et al. (2016). Following this approach, we assessed the construct reliability and validity of the variables. Table 2 reports the variables' mean, standard deviation (SD), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

	Construct reliability and validity							*Fornell-Larcker criterion*					
	Indica-tors	**Mean**	**SD**	**CR**	**AVE**	**CA**		**Use**	**UE**	**RE**	**SEA**	**OEA**	**EI**
Use	3	3.335	1.032	0.973	0.923	0.958		**0.961**					
UE	4	3,972	0.695	0.864	0.620	0.785		0.054	**0.787**				
RE	4	3.585	0.705	0.870	0.630	0.800		0.058	0.616	**0.794**			
SEA	4	3.848	0.729	0.888	0.664	0.831		0.176	0.497	0.607	**0.815**		
OEA	4	3.830	0.731	0.869	0.627	0.797		0.259	0.503	0.376	0.535	**0.792**	
EI	4	3.794	0.595	0.851	0.592	0.813		0.231					**0.769**

Notes:

All items underlying the above constructs were measured using five-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

SD: Standard deviation; CR: Composite reliability; AVE: Average variance extracted; CA: Cronbach's alpha.

Table 2. Construct reliability & validity and discriminant validity

We also examined the loadings and cross loadings. The results show that most outer loadings exceed the threshold of 0.7. For the few indicators with loadings between 0.4 and 0.7, both the AVE and CR exceed the mandatory thresholds (Hair et al., 2016) and could therefore be used to evaluate the structural model (Hair et al., 2016). Additionally, all the cross-loading differences exceed the recommended threshold of 0.1 (Gefen and Straub, 2005). Table 2 also shows that the measurement model meets the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Complementing the Fornell-Larcker criterion, we also checked the HTMT values, which are all lower than 0.9 (Hair et al., 2016).

4.2 Structural model

After successfully assessing the measurement model, we assessed the structural model. Our hypothesis predicts that the degree of EI has a positive impact on an individual's use of Facebook. However, Table 3 shows that the relationship is not significant, therefore our hypothesis is rejected.

Path	**Path coefficient**	**t**	**p-value**	**R^2 (adj) / Q^2**
Emotional intelligence → Facebook use	0.178	1.072^{ns}	0.284^{ns}	0.114 / 0.107

Table 3. Path coefficients and significance levels of the full model (not significant ^{ns})

The result of the structural model evaluation is somewhat surprising, as our hypothesis is deeply grounded in existing literature. It is therefore essential to evaluate potential causes of the rejection. Hair et al. (2017) state that the assumption of analyzing a heterogeneous data set may lead to misleading results. Looking at the studied phenomenon, we need to review the possibility of incorporating some kind of unobserved heterogeneity in our sample. As already mentioned, literature shows that social media use differs extensively among various demographic characteristics, such as age or gender (Lin and Lu, 2011). Based on this, we applied a post-hoc analysis by evaluating whether our sample implies an unobserved heterogeneity.

4.3 Post-hoc analysis – unobserved heterogeneity

To test for unobserved heterogeneity, we followed Hair et al. (2017) and began running the PLS-FMIX procedure to check for meaningful segments in the sample. Looking at the relevant fit indices and the relative segment sizes, and considering the limited options regarding the sample size, we found evidence of a possible two-segment solution. We further noticed a slight increase in segment-specific R^2 values. By looking at the segment-specific path coefficients, we found that in the first segment, EI and Facebook

use are highly negatively correlated, while they are positively correlated in the second segment. We therefore proceeded with the proposed analysis by running the PLS-POS procedure for two segments, and discovered a greater increase in segment-specific R^2 values. We finally extracted the segment assignment in order to find an explanation of this latent segment structure.

Since we started this post-hoc analysis based on the hypothesis that demographics might cause this unobserved heterogeneity, we applied a MANOVA to test whether the latent segment assignment is related to any of those variables (see Table 4).

	Mean total	**Mean segment 1 (size: 63)**	**Mean segment 2 (size: 42)**	**Significance level (p-value)**
Age	25.53	23.92	27.95	$.001^{***}$
# FB friends	365.97	384.48	338.48	$.450^{ns}$
Gender	60(female); 44(male)[1]	36(female); 26(male)[1]	24(female); 18(male)	$.926^{ns}$

Table 4. Results from MANOVA on demographics (highly significant***; not significant ^{ns})

Table 4 shows that factor 'age' differs statistically significant between the latent segments. We therefore created two data groups, splitting our sample at the age of 25, which roughly indicates the mean value. This created a data group with the younger participants and one that included the older participants. We assessed both the measurement model and the structural model for each data group. Regarding the measurement model, no major differences from the total sample group could be identified, therefore we ensured a valid measurement model for both data groups. Table 5 shows the result of the structural model assessment.

	Path	**Path coefficient**	**t**	**p-value**	**R^2 (adj) / Q^2**
Younger group	Emotional intelligence → Facebook use	0.477	4.602***	0.000***	0.282 / 0.285
Older group	Emotional intelligence → Facebook use	-0.413	3.457***	0.001***	0.252 / 0.250

Table 5. Path coefficients and significance levels of the two groups (highly significant***)

Regarding the younger group, the control variables do not have any significant impact on Facebook use. Looking at the older group, we find that the number of Facebook friends influences an individual's Facebook use (0.365 / p=0.001). Removing the control variables from our model had only small effects on the path coefficient, resulting in no change in the path significance levels.

Additionally, we performed a multi-group analysis as Hair et al. (2017) recommended by using a permutation test in SmartPLS to verify that those path coefficients statistically differ from each other.

5 Discussion and future work

Our initial hypothesis of a positive relation between EI and social network (Facebook) use could only be partially confirmed after a thorough analysis of our full pre-study sample. Due to its heterogeneity, the post-hoc analysis revealed two groups that showed contrary relations between EI and Facebook use. Dividing our full sample into two groups based on age, we found that the relationship between EI and Facebook use is very positive for the younger group and very negative for the older group.

[1] One participant did not indicate any gender.

This extreme dichotomy between these two groups is rather surprising and has to serve as a basis for further research as to why such a switch occurs. Research suggests that members of a younger cohort use Facebook more and are accustomed to it, as they grew up with social media (Bolton et al., 2013). They possibly develop their EI through or along with social media use and through social networks, while the older cohort is alienated by the frequent superficial relationships on Facebook (Correa et al., 2010; Maier et al., 2012) with increasing EI. It is also surprising that the EI levels of both groups do not strongly deviate from each other, since EI can increase over time as an individual becomes more educated and gains life experience (Fariselli et al., 2008).

Although our sample size of 105 Facebook users can be seen as sufficient for a pre-study to test our measurement model and to find first indications of a potential twofold relationship between EI and Facebook use, the sample size should be drastically increased in a full study. Based on our data collection strategy of using the snowball effect, we only tested the representativeness of our sample on the basis of comparing the demographics to the general population of Facebook users. However, for the upcoming data collection for our full study, the representativeness should be more thoroughly ensured and justified (such as non-response or self-selection bias). Furthermore, using the demographic variable age for dividing the sample is solely based on statistics. However, future research endeavors should aim to validate whether age is really the distinctive factor or whether the distinctive factor only highly correlates with age. Other research opportunities with a larger sample could be dividing the sample into groups according to gender, as some research suggests that in general females could have higher EI than males (Meshkat and Nejati, 2017).

Our study contributes to theory by being a first step towards establishing EI as a noteworthy concept in social media and IS research. We introduced the EI conceptualization and operationalizations by Wong and Law (2002) into social media and social network research. Furthermore, our research could also have practical implications regarding how social network design and social media marketing have to be aligned towards target groups of different ages. A younger audience that heavily uses social networks will be more likely to respond to a thought-out and empathic campaign that leverages emotions and therefore caters for their EI. When an older audience that heavily uses Facebook is the target of a social media campaign, their response might be higher with a simpler and less emotional-laden campaign design. Thus, social media marketers could be well-advised to take EI into account in their social network or social media campaign design.

Overall, due to its research opportunities and practical implications, EI remains an interesting concept when applied to social media matters.

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