

Coolness, control and community draw people to Pinterest

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Cool features with easy-to-follow instructions that provide control and community may keep Pinterest users pinning, liking and inviting, according to researchers, who add that these behaviors may reveal new ways people are using the web and social media.

In a study, Pinterest users indicated that the uniqueness of the site and the hand-holding support—scaffolding—were among the gratifications that predicted whether people added—or pinned—content to their Pinterest boards, according to Ruoxu Wang, a doctoral candidate in mass communications, Penn State.

"Pinterest is a relatively new [social media](#), so we thought this might be an interesting place to examine uses and gratifications," said Wang.

"What we found is that a range of new gratifications can predict different Pinterest behaviors, such as pinning."

The researchers, who report their findings in the current issue of *Social Media + Society*, added that the desire for scaffolding—or simple-to-follow navigation—significantly predicts pinning behavior among users.

"The interface of Pinterest is very intuitive to use," said Wang. "If you see some interesting pictures or videos to pin, you know you can easily pin them to your boards, following a simple step-by-step procedure."

Pinterest's unique—or cool—layout and features, particularly the ability to continually scroll to find new content, may also influence users to pin,

according to the researchers.

"People who said they used the medium because of its coolness thought that Pinterest is unique, distinctive and stylish," said S. Shyam Sundar, Distinguished Professor of Communications and co-director of the Media Effects Research Laboratory. "And those people also score high on how often they pin search and explore this site."

Wang said that pinning may be considered a more unique and novel activity compared to the sharing and liking behaviors on other social media sites, such as Facebook.

"Pinning is more of an exhibition of one's collection and interests," said Wang. "You can pin to your own account, so people can see the pins that you collected, if you make your profile page public."

Pinterest users tend to pin artistic displays, photographs, recipes and crafts, according to the researchers.

"If you see something on the internet and it pertains to your interests, you can pin it to your account," said Wang. "For instance, I'm very interested in graphic and web design, so I use Pinterest as a collecting tool for good designs and layouts. I have created a board called 'Design Inspiration' on my Pinterest account, and whenever I see good designs, I put them on that board."

Sundar said that the popularity of Pinterest reinforces the idea that visuals are driving more online behaviors.

"I think Pinterest is the epitome of the visual turn that the internet took about three or four years ago where things became much more about visual media, as highlighted by the stunning success of photo apps like Instagram and Snapchat," said Sundar.

Visual content tends to add to the credibility of the medium because "seeing is believing," he added.

In this study, participants scoring high on the realism gratification were more likely to engage in a variety of community-oriented behaviors, such as checking, commenting and inviting others to one's board.

Pinterest attracted the researchers because, as a newer social media, it might help better explore how people use new types of media and what forms of gratifications they receive from the interaction. In the past, people used media as sources of information, entertainment, and escape, to name a few. However, Sundar said that as the number of web technologies increased, researchers began to look for new explanations of new media uses and gratifications, or U&G 2.0.

"Many of the gratifications that people get from traditional media do not explain all of the behaviors of people using new media," said Sundar. "For instance, traditional U&G scales could not capture why people would click the "like" button on Facebook. In U&G 2.0, we are much more granular when we explore the gratifications obtained from newer media, such as the need for realism, user control and community-building."

For the study, the researchers recruited 113 participants to take a survey to report on how and why they used Pinterest, including U&G 2.0 measures such as coolness, scaffolding, bandwagon, interactivity and novelty.

Fan Yang, a doctoral candidate in mass communications, Penn State and Saijing Zheng, a former doctoral student at Penn State and currently a Microsoft researcher, worked with Sundar and Wang.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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