Why do women bloggers use social media? Recreation and information motivations outweigh engagement motivations

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Abstract
Analyses of survey results from a random sample of women bloggers (N = 298) show three motivations drive women to use social media – information, engagement, and recreation. The recreation motivation outweighs the other two motivations in predicting frequency of social media use. However, when differences between Facebook, Twitter, and other social media were considered, results show women bloggers turn to social media in general for recreation, but to Facebook for engagement and to Twitter for information. Findings also show that psychological needs for affiliation and self-disclosure are related to the engagement motivation, and self-disclosure is associated with the information motivation. The results are discussed in relation to need theory.

Keywords
Affiliation, blogging, Facebook, gender, need theory, self-disclosure, social media, Twitter

Introduction
Over the past decade, research on social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, has matured from the exploratory general questions about why people use social media to the identification of specific needs people gratify by frequenting these sites. This study built on this foundation by examining how two psychological needs – for affiliation and for
self-disclosure – are gratified through social media use. These needs were examined because research has found both needs can be satisfied through other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as blogging (Bane et al., 2010; Chen, 2012; Detenber et al., 2008). In addition, these needs have been found to correlate with each other in CMC (Detenber et al., 2008; Ledbetter et al., 2011), underscoring their relevance for this study. As a result, it stands to reason these needs may be gratified through social media.

In addition, this study aimed to fill a gap in the literature by examining women’s motivations for social media use specifically and how these motivations are related to frequency of social media use. Research has found social media gratifies social needs, such as for affiliation (Bonds-Raacke and Raacke, 2010; Chen, 2011; Li and Lin, 2012), information (Hughes et al., 2012; Johnson and Yang, 2009) and popularity (Utz et al., 2012). Much of this research has focused on users in general. Women – who use social media more frequently and actively than men (Brenner, 2012; Hampton et al., 2011) – have been found to turn to blogging more for its social than informational aspects (Pedersen and Macafee, 2007). Yet, the literature is essentially mum on what motivations drive women to turn to social media. This study aims to fill this void by focusing exclusively on women’s social media experience.

This gap has persisted since the early days of CMC, when men dominated the web (Bimber, 2000; Herring, 1996), much as they had offline life. As the number of women online soared (Consalvo and Paasonen, 2002), women’s online voice continued to be as muted on the web (Herring et al., 1998) as it had been in the offline public discourse. Scholars followed this trend, as CMC research went on for 20 years before it focused on gender (Pedersen and Macafee, 2007). Some people had high hopes online communication would foster equanimity, suggesting the web’s anonymity would attenuate pre-existing sexist patterns. Yet, in reality, the web may have heightened sexism, as people brought hegemonic norms of a male-dominated society to the online world (Herring, 1996; Pedersen and Macafee, 2007). Women bloggers, for example, receive less attention in the news media and from researchers in part because women tend to write about personal experiences (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt and Wright, 2004). This thrusts them into a form of digital domesticity online (Chen, 2013) because their content does not conform to the societal norms of “online success” as well as male content, which focused on linking to other web content and external topics, rather than personal issues. As a result, initially few CMC studies focused exclusively on women’s online communication, but rather compared women to the implied norm of the male experience. Because of this history, it is imperative for some research to focus exclusively on women’s online content, so a clear understanding of their role in blogging, social media, and all CMC can be understood on its own merit. This type of inquiry will enable a more full understanding of the role of gender in all types of CMC.

Based on this foundation, this research aimed to answer the following questions: What are women’s main motivations for social media use? How are those motivations related to frequency of social media use? Does that vary by social medium? How do women’s needs for affiliation and self-disclosure relate to their social media use?

To answer these questions, I surveyed a random sample of women bloggers, under the assumption these bloggers are a subset of the female population already active online.
and, therefore, likely to be exposed to social media. Women who blog have been found to be more likely to use Facebook and Twitter, as well as other social media, such as FourSquare, Instagram, and Pinterest, than the general population (BlogHer, 2012). As a result, this population offered a fertile opportunity to examine both motivations for social media use and needs met through social media use in an active population that could serve as a microcosm of the general populace. Therefore, this study offered new knowledge by being among the first to explain both what motivates women bloggers to use social media and whether needs for affiliation and self-disclosure are met through social media use.

**Literature review**

**Need theory**

The theoretical support for this paper comes from psychological need theory, which posits that people have needs or deficits in themselves that they seek to fill in an effort to reach homeostasis (Maslow, 1987). As such, needs may prompt behavior (Ryan and Deci, 2008) and serve as motivations. Maslow (1987) argued people sort needs into a hierarchy, satisfying primary needs such as hunger and thirst first and then moving to secondary needs, such as needs to engage with people, gain information, recreate, affiliate, or self-disclose. People may seek to fill a need without being cognizant of that need. For example, people may seek friendships with many people without thinking about having a need for affiliation. As such, these psychological needs may be unconscious but still motivate behavior.

Need theory was chosen for this study because recent research has applied it to other forms of CMC, including blogging (Detenber et al., 2008) and Twitter use (Chen, 2011). A goal of this paper was to extend this classic theory to women’s social media use. This is a worthwhile goal because need theory offers a way to examine underlying needs that drive women’s social media use, rather than rely solely on why women think they use social media as prior research has done (BlogHer, 2012). By specifically examining motivations for social media use, this paper offers new knowledge because most prior research has examined earlier forms of CMC, such as blogging (e.g. Nardi et al., 2004).

**The current study**

This study focused on engagement, information, and recreation motivations, and two psychological needs, for affiliation and for self-disclosure. These are relevant because prior research has found them to be satisfied through online interactions, including on social media sites, where people create profiles about themselves and communicate with others (boyd and Ellison, 2007; Thelwall, 2008). I will discuss the engagement, information, and recreation motivations and related research questions first, followed by the two psychological needs and the related hypothesis and research questions.

Research has consistently found people use social media for engagement. This includes using social media to make new friends, find old friends, and maintain relationships across distance, and foster a feeling of camaraderie with others, even
strangers (e.g. Bonds-Raacke and Raacke, 2010; Chen, 2011; Li and Lin, 2012). People focused on forming relationships with others are most likely to see social media as a way to enhance these connections with other people (Kim et al., 2010). While interacting on social media, people may picture their “imagined audience” (Marwick and boyd, 2010: 115) to guide their communication. This sense of community mimics offline sense of community (Gruzd et al., 2011), but employs less formal connections (Chen, 2011), exemplified by Granovetter’s (1973) concept of weak ties. Researchers have identified this engagement motivation in blogging (e.g. Liao et al., 2011), emphasizing the relevance of studying this motivation among bloggers using social media.

However, research also has found that a drive for information is tied to social media use. People use social media to share a range of information, including their own experiences and links to news stories or blogs (Java et al., 2007). Johnson and Yang (2009) found information motives were positively related to Twitter use. In an analysis of 521 active Twitter accounts over 282 days, Rui and Whinston found social media have a “social broadcasting” (2010: 310) function to convey information. Similarly, a survey of 343 undergraduates found they were more likely to share personal information, such as their email address or pictures of friends, on Facebook than they would offline (Christofides et al., 2009). Similarly, recreation has been found to be a strong motivation for participating in all types of virtual communities (Ridings and Gefen, 2004), although little research has explored this motivation specifically on social media.

Based on this foundation, this study’s first aim was to examine what motivations draw women bloggers to social media. Once these motivations were identified, the next logical question was which of these motivations predict greater frequency of social media use. A third step was to assess whether these motivations varied, depending on the medium the user preferred. This was done to build on earlier social media research, which has mainly focused on an individual social medium, usually Facebook or Twitter (e.g. boyd et al., 2010; Chen, 2012; Ledbetter et al., 2011; Zappavigna, 2011), rather than comparing social media as this current study did. Therefore, I posed the following questions:

RQ1: For women bloggers, what are the primary motivations for using social media?
RQ2: For women bloggers, what motivations are the strongest predictors of frequency of social media use?
RQ3: For women bloggers, how do motivations for social media use vary depending on which medium is preferred?

Another aim of this paper was to examine two psychological needs – for affiliation and for self-disclosure – that prior research has found could be gratified through online communication (Bane et al., 2010; Chen, 2011, 2012; Detenber et al., 2008). Need for affiliation stems from human’s earliest roots as social creatures, where gathering in groups was necessary to survival. As a result, people today continue to seek other people because of this biological pre-disposition (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Need for self-disclosure is defined as the propensity to offer personal information, including thoughts or feelings (Wheeless, 1978), to express one’s self. Much interaction on CMC involves self-disclosure of personal information (Chen, 2012; Ko and Kuo, 2009; Ledbetter et al., 2011), such as
name, political affiliation, or religious beliefs on social media profiles. This made this variable particularly relevant for this study. In addition, research has found women are more likely to disclose personal information on the web than men (Punyanunt-Carter, 2006), highlighting the appropriateness of this variable in a study of women bloggers.

Because needs for affiliation and self-disclosure have been found to positively correlate both online and offline (e.g. Chen, 2012; Detenber et al., 2008; Hill, 1987; Ledbetter et al., 2011), these needs were predicted to correlate among women bloggers. In addition, this study probed whether women bloggers satisfied both needs for affiliation and self-disclosure through social media use. In these analyses, both needs were included simultaneously in statistical models, so any inter-related effects could be detected, and each need would serve as a statistical control for the other need. Therefore:

H1: For women bloggers, needs for affiliation and self-disclosure will positively correlate.

RQ4: For women bloggers, how do need for affiliation and need for self-disclosure predict motivations for social media use while controlling for the other need?

Methods

A 62-question online survey was conducted on Survey Gizmo in spring 2010 of a random sample of women bloggers drawn from four women’s blog directories. The directories were BlogHer; BlackWomenBylogs.com; BlogsByWomen.org; and Blogadera.com, a Latina blog site. BlogHer offered the largest worldwide directory of women bloggers (Jesella, 2008) when data were collected, so it was selected as the main population. It was judged BlogHer offered a larger group of women bloggers than general blogging sites that may include men. The other blogging directories were employed with a goal of reaching a more racially diverse population. A total of 1500 bloggers were randomly selected out of the population of 22,098 blogs collectively listed on the four directories at the time of data collection. Using a random start, I created the sample by selecting every 14th blog from the 18,781 blogs listed on BlogHer, and every 5th blog from the others’ lists. At the time, BlackWomenBlogs.com listed 62 blogs; Blogadera.com listed 229, and BlogsByWomen.com listed 3026. Eliminated from the sample were blogs where the bloggers self-identified as male or group blogs with multiple contributing authors, because this study focused on individual female bloggers. Also excluded were blogs that had not been updated in the past two months, appeared to be spam blogs that exist only to boost page rank (Li and Walejko, 2008), and blogs in languages other than English. I contacted each blogger by email or a “contact me” form on the blog if it were available. Bloggers who offered neither of these methods, received a comment from me on their blog with a link to my questionnaire.

Sample

A total of 392 women submitted questionnaires online. When respondents who had not answered a majority of questions were removed from the sample, the N dropped to 294 for a response rate of 20%. Overall, the sample was predominantly white (81.4%). Respondents on average were 37.16 years old (SD = 9.99; median = 35) and had at least a bachelor’s degree (M = 18.15 years of education; SD = 6.44; median = 18).
Social media motivations

An initial objective of this study was to determine what motivations drive women to blog. To explore this, I employed measures of motivations for Twitter use, adapted from previous research (Johnson and Yang, 2009). For each of the 15 statements, participants rated on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale whether the statement was a reason they use social media. The statements were: “To express myself freely,” “To get information (facts, links, news, knowledge, etc.),” “To learn interesting things,” “To meet new people,” “To share information (facts, links, news, knowledge, etc.),” “To participate in discussions,” “To have fun,” “To be entertained,” “To relax,” “To pass the time,” “To see what others are up to,” “To communicate more easily,” “To communicate with many people at the same time,” and “To give or receive advice,” “To keep up with my family and friends.” Means and standard deviations for each of these statements are provided in Table 1.

Social media use

Because one aim of this study was to examine women bloggers’ general social media use, not only use of a specific social-networking site, respondents were asked to indicate whether they used 12 social media sites that were among the most popular during data collection (eBizMBA.com, 2010). The list consisted of Bebo, Classmates.com, Digg, Facebook, Flickr, Friendster, Google Wave, hi5, Linked In, MySpace, Stumble Upon, and Twitter. The women reported which social medium they used most. Women in the sample on average used 5.9 (SD = 2.66) types of social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, or Linked In. Overwhelming, Facebook was most popular (70.4%), followed by Twitter (21.1%), Flickr (2%), Linked In (1.1%), Stumble Upon (0.7%), and other (4.4%). Social media frequency was operationalized by asking respondents how many days per week and minutes per day they spent using the social medium they used most frequently. Answers to these two questions were multiplied and then divided by 60 to derive hours per week of social media use. Respondents used their favorite social medium on average 6.35 hours per week (SD = 8.43; median 3.5). A logarithmic 10 transformation was conducted on this variable to adjust for its high positive skew (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007), and the logged variable was used for statistical analyses.

Need for self-disclosure

This concept was operationalized using an adaption of an index from prior research (Chen, 2012; Detenber et al., 2008; Wheeless, 1978). Respondents were asked to rate agreement on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale to the following: “I frequently express my personal beliefs and opinions” and “I often discuss my feelings.” These were averaged into an index with acceptable reliability (M = 3.78, SD = .79, Cronbach’s α = .72).

Need for affiliation

This concept was measured using statements adapted from the literature (Chen, 2012; Detenber et al., 2008). Respondents were asked to rate agreement on a 1 (strongly
disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale to the following: “I am a ‘people’ person,” “When I have a choice, I try to be in a group instead of by myself,” and “I spend a lot of time with other people.” These were averaged into an index with acceptable reliability ($M = 3.32$, $SD = .87$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$).

### Control variables

Length of time women had been blogging and frequency with which they blogged were used as control variables because these concepts might relate to women bloggers’ frequency of social media use. On average, women in the sample were active bloggers for more than 3 years at the time of survey ($M = 34.15$ months, $SD = 28.81$) and spent 4.9 hours per week on average ($SD = 5.08$) blogging. As both variables were positively skewed, they were transformed (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). A logarithmic 10 transformation was used for the more severely skewed hours per week spent blogging, while square root transformation was employed for the less skewed active months blogging. All analyses reported in the results section use transformed variables.

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**Table 1.** Factor analysis (principal components analysis with varimax rotation) of 15 measures of motivations for social media use, $N = 294$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Factor 1: Information</th>
<th>Factor 2: Recreation</th>
<th>Factor 3: Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To participate in discussions</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn interesting things</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get information, facts, links, news knowledge, etc.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To share information, facts, links, news knowledge, etc.</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet new people</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To give or receive advice</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To express myself freely</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be entertained</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have fun</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To relax</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pass the time</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate more easily</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To keep in touch with family and friends</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with many people at the same time</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To see what others are up to</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total variance explained</td>
<td>28.09</td>
<td>18.89</td>
<td>15.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s $\alpha$</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses were coded 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
Results

Research question 1 asked, what are women bloggers’ primary motivations for using social media? An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to answer this question by analyzing inter-correlations among the 15 motivation measurement items. The traditional method for figuring out the number of factors relies on components with eigenvalues greater than 1. However, a scree plot test (Cattell, 1966) also was used in determining factors to keep. The data suggested three factors: information, recreation, and engagement. Then a principal components factors analysis with varimax rotation was conducted that constrained loadings to three factors (Table 1), which explained 62.23% of the data’s total variance. The first factor consisted of seven indicators of information motivation, accounting for 28.1% of the data’s total variance. The second factor consisted of four indicators of recreation motivation and accounted for 18.9% of total variance. The third factor had four indicators of engagement motivation and accounted for 15.25% of total variance. One indicator, “to communicate with many people at the same time” loaded on both the information and engagement factors. It was included on engagement because of its much higher loading there. Similarly, “To see what others are up to” loaded on both recreation and engagement. The loading was higher for engagement, so it was included in that factor. Reliability analyses were conducted for each factor, and they were averaged into indices used in the future analyses. Information ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .82$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$) and recreation ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .77$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$) had high reliability while engagement’s reliability was acceptable ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .68$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$).

Research question 2 asked which of the three motivations for social media would be the strongest predictor of frequency of social media use. Firstly, Pearson’s $r$ correlation coefficients were used to test bivariate relationships. All three motivations showed moderate statistically significant positive relationships with hours per week spent on social media (recreation, $r = .43$, $p < .001$; information, $r = .35$, $p < .001$; and engagement, $r = .25$, $p < .001$). Then hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to analyze the relationships (Table 2). Collectively, when all variables were entered, they accounted for 32% of the variance in frequency of social media use. The information, recreation, and engagement motivation indices were entered in model 1, and the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .24$, $F = 30.21$, $p < .001$. In model 1, recreation ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) was the strongest predictor of frequent social media use, although the information motivation also showed a statistically significant positive relationship ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$). The engagement motivation remained non-significant, although months actively blogging ($\beta = .11$, $p = .03$) and hours per week spent blogging ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$) shared variance in explaining time spent on social media. An incremental $F$ test ($F = 10.95$, $p < .05$)
comparing the variance explained in model 1 to the variance explained in model 2 showed that adding the control variables increased the amount of variance explained in time spent on social media. These findings show that the recreation motivation is the main driving force for spending time on social media, although one’s age and how frequently and for how long one has blogged also play a role.

Research question 3 asked how motivations for social media use varied depending on the medium used. To answer this question, the sample was divided into three groups based on the social medium participants reported as being their favorite. These groups were comprised of 207 subjects who selected Facebook, 63 who selected Twitter, and 24 who selected other social media, including Flickr, Linked In, and Stumble Upon. A series of one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analyses were conducted, using each of the motivations for social media use as the dependent variables.

Results showed a significant difference in engagement motivation based on social media used, $F(2, 291) = 25.17, p = .000, \eta^2 = .15$. Using Scheffe post-hoc corrections, results showed that women who selected Facebook as the favorite social medium ($M = 4.27, SD = .58$) reported stronger engagement motivation compared to those who selected Twitter ($M = 3.92, SD = .66, p = .001$) or other social-networking sites ($M = 3.40, SD = .91, p = .000$) as their favorite.

### Table 2. Hierarchical OLS regression of motivations for social media use and control variables on frequency of social media use, $N = 289$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information motivationa</td>
<td>0.11**</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.10**</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation motivationa</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.14**</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement motivationa</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>–0.08**</td>
<td>–0.21</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months actively blogging (SR)</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours per week blogging (log)</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>–5.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>–5.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ value</td>
<td>30.21**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21.89**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OLS: ordinary least squares; SE: standard error; Log: logarithmic 10 transformed variable; SR: square root transformed variable.

*aAveraged indices of five-item scales.

*p $<=$ .05; **p $<=$ .05
Findings also showed a significant difference in information motivation based on social media used, $F(2, 291) = 20.47, p = .000, \eta^2 = .12$. Using Scheffe post-hoc corrections, results showed that women who selected Twitter as the favorite social medium ($M = 3.95, SD = .66$) reported stronger information motivation compared to those who selected Facebook ($M = 3.23, SD = .80, p < .001$). However, no significant differences were found between either Facebook or Twitter compared with those who selected another social-networking site as the favorite ($M = 3.56, SD = .77, p > .05$). For the recreation motivation, no significant differences were found dependent on social media use.

These results suggested women bloggers turn to Facebook for engagement and Twitter for information, but a desire for recreation motivates them to turn to social media in general.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between needs for affiliation and self-disclosure among women bloggers, and the data support this ($r = .29, p < .001$). Research question 4 sought to find out how the psychological needs for affiliation and self-disclosure individually predict the three motivations identified for social media use, information, recreation, and engagement, while controlling for the other need. Firstly, Pearson’s $r$ correlation coefficients were used to test bivariate relationships. Need for affiliation showed small but statistically significant relationships with the information motivation ($r = .11, p = .05$) and engagement motivation ($r = .27, p < .001$), but not with the recreation motivation. Need for self-disclosure showed small but statistically significant relationships with the engagement motivation ($r = .27, p < .001$), the information motivation ($r = .21, p < .001$), and the recreation motivation ($r = .15, p < .001$). Then a series of hierarchical regression were used to explore these relationships further (Table 3).

With recreation as a motivation for social media use, all variables collectively accounted for 11% of the variance. Needs for affiliation and self-disclosure were entered in model 1 together, so the individual effect of each need could be assessed while controlling for the other need. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .02, F = 3.16, p = .04$. In model 1, need for self-disclosure ($\beta = .12, p = .04$) predicted recreation as a motivation for social media use, but need for affiliation did not. In model 2, when age, months spent blogging, and hours per week spent blogging were added as controls, the overall model remained significant, $R^2 = .11, F = 7.13, p < .001$. Need for self-disclosure lost significance, and age became the only significant predictor, $\beta = -.29, p < .001$. The negative relationship between age and recreation as a motivation for social media use suggests this motivation is more important to younger women bloggers than older ones. These findings suggest that for the recreation motivation, neither self-disclosure nor affiliation showed significant effects when other variables were taken into account.

With information as a motivation for social media use, all variables collectively accounted for 8% of the variance. Needs for affiliation and self-disclosure were entered in model 1 together, so individual effect of each need could be assessed while controlling for the other need. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .05, F = 6.98, p = .001$. In model 1, need for self-disclosure ($\beta = .19, p = .002$) predicted information as a motivation for social media use, but need for affiliation did not. In model 2, when age, months spent blogging, and hours per week spent blogging were added as controls, the overall model remained significant, $R^2 = .08, F = 4.65, p < .001$. Need for self-disclosure
remained a statistically significant predictor of information as a motivation for social media use ($\beta = .19, p = .002$), but hours per week spent blogging ($\beta = .13, p = .02$) and active months blogging ($\beta = .12, p = .04$) shared in the variance. This suggests need for self-disclosure predicts social media use, even when controlling for need for affiliation and the other control variables.

With engagement as a motivation for social media use, all variables collectively accounted for 12% of the variance. In model 1, needs for affiliation and self-disclosure were entered together, so the individual effect of each need could be assessed while controlling for the other need. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .09, F = 14.56, p < .001$. Both need for affiliation ($\beta = .16, p = .006$) and need for self-disclosure ($\beta = .21, p < .001$) predicted engagement as a motivation for social media use. In model 2, the overall model remained significant when age, months spent blogging, and hours per week spent blogging were added in as controls, $R^2 = .12, F = 7.93, p < .001$. Both need for affiliation ($\beta = .17, p = .004$) and need for self-disclosure ($\beta = .20, p = .001$) remained significant predictors of engagement motivation for social media use, although age shared some variance ($\beta = -.12, p = .04$). The negative relationship with age indicated that the recreation motivation for social media use is more influential in younger women. Furthermore, these findings suggested that for the engagement motivation both need for affiliation and need for self-disclosure predict social media use while controlling for the other need, although self-disclosure explains more of the variance in social media use.

### Table 3. Hierarchical OLS regression of need for affiliation and need for self-disclosure on control variables on motivations for social media use. Only final models are shown, $N = 289$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recreation$^a$</th>
<th>Information$^a$</th>
<th>Engagement$^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation$^a$</td>
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<td>.058</td>
<td>.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure$^a$</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>-.294</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active months blogging (SR)</td>
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<td>.102</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours blogging (Log)</td>
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<td>-.013</td>
<td>.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$ value</td>
<td>7.13***</td>
<td>4.65***</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. $R^2$</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OLS: ordinary least squares; SE: standard error; SR: square root transformed variable; Log: logarithmic 10 transformed variable.

$^a$Averaged indices measured on five-point scale.

$^*= p < .05; \quad ^{**}= p < .01; \quad ^{***}= p < .001$. 

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Discussion

The main aim of this research was to assess women’s motivations for social media use and how those motivations relate to frequency of social media use. A secondary goal was to examine how needs for affiliation and self-disclosure, which have been found to play a role in other CMC (Bane et al., 2010; Chen, 2012; Detenber et al., 2008; Gruzd et al., 2011), relate to frequency of social media use. This research paved new ground by exploring motivations for social media use among a random sample of women bloggers, because this population is more likely to use a variety of social media than the general public (BlogHer, 2012), making it fertile opportunity to examine these questions. It also extended the psychological theory of needs to the CMC world of social media. The study’s contribution to the literature in regard to motivations for social media use will be discussed first, followed by an exploration of the findings in regard to how needs for affiliation and self-disclosure are met through social media use. Then I will discuss practical ramifications of these findings and how these results enhance our understanding of the female CMC experience.

A main contribution of this study was establishing three motivations for social media use – information, engagement, and recreation – at least among women bloggers. This supports earlier research that has identified social (Bonds-Raacke and Raacke, 2010; Chen, 2011; Kim et al., 2010; Thelwall, 2008) and informational motivations for social media use (Christofides et al., 2009; Java et al., 2007; Rui and Whinston, 2010). However, this study offered new knowledge by identifying recreation as a motivation for social media use in general. Prior research has found recreation as a motivation for various types of virtual communities (Ridings and Gefen, 2004), although this motivation has received less exploration specifically in regard to social media. In addition, this current study established that the recreation motivation explained the most variance in frequency of social media use in general, outweighing information and engagement motivations. However, when differences between Facebook, Twitter, and other social media were considered in regard to these three motivations, the results change somewhat. Findings suggest women bloggers turn to Facebook for engagement and Twitter for information, but a desire for recreation motivates them to turn to social media in general.

Practical implications

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest Twitter is an information-exchange medium, while Facebook is more social. As news organizations aim to use social media to form communities among their readers and disseminate their news and information, this finding offers early guidance regarding which social medium would be most relevant for their work. In addition, marketers and public relations practitioners might heed these findings to choose Facebook when the goal is engagement with clients and customers, but opt for Twitter when the aim is spreading information. For information professionals, these findings suggest people may seek different computer-mediated platforms for different reasons, which should offer guidance as new social media are designed. Some platforms might be designed specifically for an information motivation, while others aim to satisfy engagement or recreation motives.
Clearly, women bloggers in this study were motivated by both engagement and information, but these motivations paled in comparison to recreation. This suggests social media must be entertaining or people will not use it. It is also notable that while the engagement motivation correlated with frequency of social media use, this relationship became non-significant once information and recreation motivations were considered. This suggests that social media may be “social,” but recreation and information motivations should not be ignored. These findings also support that while the recreation motivation may be the main driving force for spending time on social media, one’s age and how frequently and for how long one has blogged also play a role, at least among women bloggers. Age showed a negative relationship with frequency of social media use, suggesting younger bloggers spend more time on social media. This fits research findings in general that establish social media as more popular among the young (Lenhart et al., 2012).

Another contribution of this work is to extend the psychological theory of needs to the CMC world of social media. Needs theory posits that people have secondary needs or deficits in themselves that they may seek to fill once their primary needs of hunger and thirst are met (Maslow, 1987). Blogging has been found to meet secondary needs for affiliation and self-disclosure (Chen, 2012; Detenber et al., 2008). This current study extended this finding by showing that needs for affiliation and self-disclosure also play a role in motivations for social media use. This was particularly true in regard to the information and engagement motivations. Need for self-disclosure correlated with information motives for social media use among women bloggers, sharing some variance with how long the blogger spends blogging. Similarly, for the engagement motivation for social media use, both needs for affiliation and self-disclosure were significant predictors, sharing variance with age. This confirmed the relevance and importance of studying needs for affiliation and self-disclosure in understanding social media motivations. This finding also offered support for using need theory in the computer-mediated realm. However, it is notable that for the recreation motivation for social media use, need for affiliation played no role, and need for self-disclosure dropped out as a predictor once age was entered into the equation. This suggests that how women meet their psychological needs through social media use might vary dependent on what motivation for using social media drives them.

Gender and computer-mediated communication

In addition, these findings expand our understanding of how women use CMC in the specific venue of social media, which has received little study focused specifically on women. This is an important contribution because women’s online communication in general has received little targeted research, which may have lead to it being devalued in society (Herring, 1996; Pedersen and Macafee, 2007). In fact, even names used to describe women’s online communication – such as mommy blogger – have been found to marginalize some women who found the term constricting, relegating women into an online domestic sphere that re-affirms society’s male-dominated norms (Chen, 2013). Wackwitz and Rakow (2007) have argued persuasively that women having a voice may be the most important part of ending sexism, so this current study offers a means to
understand that voice on its own merit, rather than by measuring it by the hegemonic norm of the male CMC experience. In so doing, we gain a greater understanding of the more general role of gender in CMC.

Limitations and future research

It is important to note that the population used in this study may have influenced findings. All participants were women who actively blog, so it is plausible their information and engagement motivations were already being partially met through blogging, leaving recreation for social media use. Further study of motivations for social media use among other populations is needed to answer this question.

A second limitation is this study focused on two psychological needs and three motivations for social media use. Certainly, many more needs and motivations may play a role in understanding why people use social media and how they meet psychological needs through social media. For example, Utz et al. (2012) have examined a need for popularity in regard to social media. Needs for cognition or attention also may play a role. This study’s three motivations for social media use, recreation, information, and engagement leave unexplained nearly 40% of the variance. More research is needed to understand what variables play a role to make up this gap.

Future research also should focus on the interplay between the three motivations for social media use identified in this study, namely engagement, information, and recreation. This study suggested that the needs that people seek to fill with social media play a strong role in what motivates them to use social media, and that motivations for social media use vary among people. More study is needed to link specific needs to specific motivations and specific social media.

Conclusion

In summary, this study begins to answer the question of why women bloggers use social media. Clearly, recreation is a strong motivator, as is information, and needs for affiliation and self-disclosure play a role, along with age. Facebook and Twitter may offer differing motivations. This study offered a new way of examining motivations for social media use, and it provided an early look at the complexity of how psychological needs relate to motivations for social media use. It also extended using psychological needs theory in studies of social media. Finally, this study suggested that women use social media for different reasons, depending on what underlying needs are greatest in them, a finding that was first established in blogging (Chen, 2011).

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Notes

1. Three reverse-scored statements, “I do not often talk about myself,” “My statements about my feelings are usually brief,” and “My conversations last the least time when I am discussing
myself,” were dropped from the need for self-disclosure scale because of low reliability, Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .58 \).

2. Two reverse-scored statements, “I prefer to be on my own and let others be on their own” and “I try my best to do things on my own” were dropped from the need for self-disclosure scale because of low reliability, Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .46 \).

3. The author thanks one anonymous reviewer for making this salient point.

References


**Author biography**

Gina M Chen (PhD, Syracuse University) is an assistant professor at The University of Southern Mississippi’s School of Mass Communication and Journalism, USA. Her research focuses on online engagement and its darker side – aversive virtual communication.