

Research Article

Social Media Networks and Gen Y

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the various social media platforms and to investigate gender differences in the use of social media networks. For the past 10 years, the use of social media has grown tremendously, ultimately becoming an important part of our lives. A total of 142 undergraduates participated in the study. All data were collected by using quantitative methods. The information obtained from this study can provide a guideline for understanding the usage of social media among members of Generation Y. Results of the investigation revealed a significant difference between female and male social media users. Moreover, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were identified as the most popular social networking sites preferred by the respondents.

Keywords: Gen Y and social media and platform, social networks

INTRODUCTION

Generation Y (Gen Y) consists of individuals who were born in the digital age. In particular, Gen Y is the first generation in history to which the notion “the younger they are, the more they know” applies. Meletopoulos and Reischl (2009) declared that Gen Ys are optimistic, confident, team-spirited and capable of multitasking. With the emergence of new technologies, Gen Ys have become impatient with the “old-fashioned” ways of doing things because they are already used to accomplishing their tasks quickly through widely available technology (Casben, 2007). In most cases, Gen Ys quickly become bored and thus resort to the use of technology-driven social networks for constant engagement.

According to the report of David (2013) on the social media statistics of Malaysia, 64.7% of the country’s population uses the Internet. Among these users, 75.5% have their own Facebook accounts. Given this statistic, Malaysia has become the 8th country in Asia and the 21st country in the world with the largest number of registered Facebook users. The most frequent users of social media platforms such as Facebook are aged 18 to 24 years. Many studies have explored the subject of social marketing, but only a few have investigated the use of social networking sites among Gen Y.

These users spend one third of their time in social media networks. Given the major role of social media in the lives of the members of Gen Y, there is need to identify the sites that are popular among the Malaysian members of this generation and determine how these individuals use these sites. The result will benefit the entrepreneurs to market their products in social

networks. Therefore, this study is very important to analysis the usage of social media among Gen Y in Malaysia.

Social media: The advancement of social media has changed the way we use these platforms, that is, from using them as part of our daily routine to using them for business. These platforms are used particularly by Gen Ys not only as a means of self-expression but also as a business tool for attracting new customers. Facebook founder Zuckerberg (2005) stated that this social media platform can bring people together for a wide variety of relationships cited Lewis (2010). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) affirmed that social media content is a powerful web technology that connects people without boundaries, allowing users to generate relevant content.

Lai and Turban defined social media as an online platform where people share their opinions and experiences with others. Consantinides (2009) and Richardson (2009) classified social media into eight main titles, namely, social networking sites, blogs, micro blogs, content sharing sites, wikis, bookmarking sites and forums. Creating a personal page does not require any specific skills. Piaget’s theory (1958) states that direct experiences, the commitment of errors and the search for solutions are imperative in the integration and adoption of knowledge. Being born in the digital age, Gen Ys prefer experience to being taught and are keen on searching for information using the Internet. They are success-driven, goal-oriented, determined, confident and optimistic.

Social media is considered by Gen Ys as an essential tool for sharing their interests, emotions and activities through photo sharing, instant messaging and games. Social media has created a novel way to

communicate and distribute information. As evidenced by the youth's extensive use of social media, this concept has become well known, especially with Gen Ys' frequent use of platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Myspace, Google Plus+, Meetup, Ask.fm, Instagram and Tumblr. This study aims to determine the preferred social networking sites of today's generation and to examine the gender differences in the use of these sites.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey method to identify the use of social networking sites among Gen Ys. Questionnaires were sent online to selected undergraduate students enrolled in private universities. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To determine the number of social networking sites for which today's generation is registered
- To examine gender differences in the number of social networking site registrations
- To investigate the preferred social networking sites of male and female users
- To identify the criteria of the present generation for adding friends to their social networking pages
- To clarify the purpose of registering to social networking sites

A total of 142 students, aged 18 to 20 years, participated in this survey. Among the respondents, 48% were female and 52% were male.

Figure 1 shows the number of social media accounts held by the male and female respondents. This Fig. 1 shows that of the female respondents, 69% are registered to three social networking sites, 28% are registered to two social networking sites and 12% are registered to one social networking site. Of the male participants, 36% are registered to one social networking site, 28% are registered to two social networking sites and 35% are registered to three social networking sites. These findings reveal that more females than males are registered to social networking sites. This conclusion matches that of Lewis (2010), who argued that females tend to view social media more positively than do males.

The participants were asked to indicate the social networking sites they are registered to (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, Myspace, Google Plus+, Meetup, Ask.fm, Instagram and Tumblr). Figure 2 shows that Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are the most popular platforms among the Gen Ys in Malaysia.

Figure 2 also shows that each participant has a Facebook account. Many participants emphasized that Facebook is the best social networking site for maintaining relationships and for sharing information and experiences with family members and close friends.

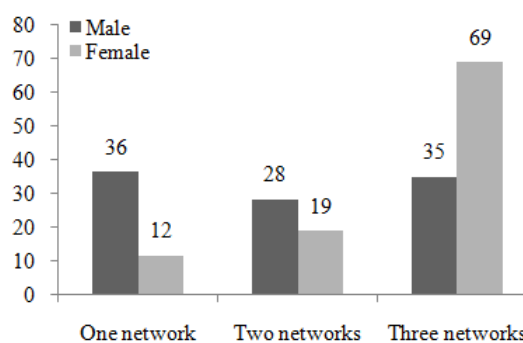


Fig. 1: Number of social media accounts held by male and female users

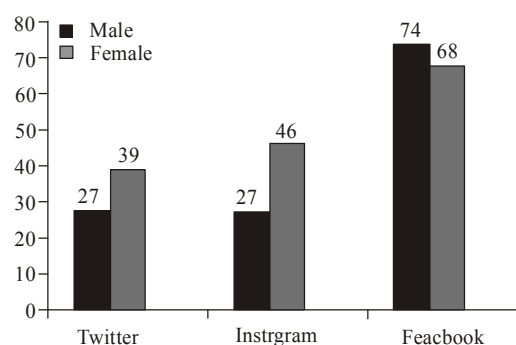


Fig. 2: Popular social networking sites among the participants

Users of platforms such as Facebook can virtually get in touch with other people from anywhere in the world within seconds. Such services are even extended to mobile phones. This specific attribute is the main factor that attracts the present generation to social media.

The social networking site that showed the second highest number of registered users among the respondents is Twitter. Twitter is very popular because it is frequently used by well-known celebrities. This platform allows users to ask anyone any question by sending out "tweets." Articles marked as a favorite can be saved and read later on via Twitter, which is also a great platform for meeting new people (Poareo, 2013).

Instagram is the third networking site that is popular among the respondents. It is a free application that can be downloaded and used by mobile users to take photos and videos, which can then be shared to other social networking sites (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). The findings of this study indicate that more females than males post photos using Instagram. As highlighted by this statistic, Instagram has become a powerful platform for self-broadcasting, providing users with the opportunity to tell their stories through photographs.

This study identified Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as the most popular and most preferred social networking sites of Gen Ys in Malaysia, with Facebook ranking first. Moreover, females engage more heavily in social media than males do.

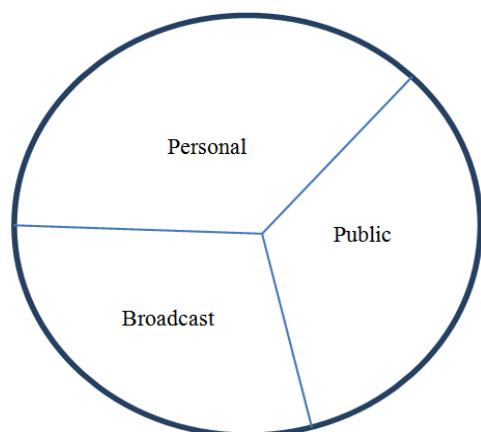


Fig. 3: Social media classification based on individual needs

This study also found that Gen Ys use social media sites based on their needs, which are as follows.

Figure 3 shows the Social media Classification based on Individual needs:

- **Personal:** To maintain close relationship with friends and family members
- **Pubic:** To keep track of the activities of famous people or to get to know new people
- **Broadcast:** To advertise their activities as a means to boost their self-confidence (self-promotion)

Usage of social network: Table 1 shows the respondents’ most preferred activities on social networking sites, which include communicating and connecting with others, conveying information, expressing emotions, sharing activities and events and learning the latest news within their social circles.

As indicated in Table 1, Gen Ys value their social relationships and want to be constantly connected with their family and friends (McAlpine, 2013a, b). This finding confirms that social media has changed the traditional means of communication to e-communication. Continuous social interaction plays a vital role in the development of cognition. In fact, individuals cannot disentangle themselves from the society in which they live (Vygotsky, 1962). Individuals have their own unique scheme of knowledge and constructivist belief that learners must interact with the environment. Social media has thus created a dynamic platform for the present generation.

Criteria for adding new friends in facebook: When adding new friends in Facebook, 60 and 68% of the male and female respondents, respectively, look for common interests; 28 and 24% choose common friends; 9 and 7% choose their friends based on physical appearance; and 4 and 9% choose their friends based on gender. Members of today’s generation believe that their identities in dynamic social media networks

Table 1: Usage of social network according to preference

| | |
|--|----|
| Communicating with friends | 1 |
| Conveying information | 2 |
| Expressing emotions | 3 |
| Sharing activities and events | 4 |
| Checking the activities of friends | 5 |
| Finding new friends | 6 |
| Micro blogging (status) | 7 |
| Acquiring product or service information | 8 |
| Playing games | 9 |
| Finding a partner | 10 |

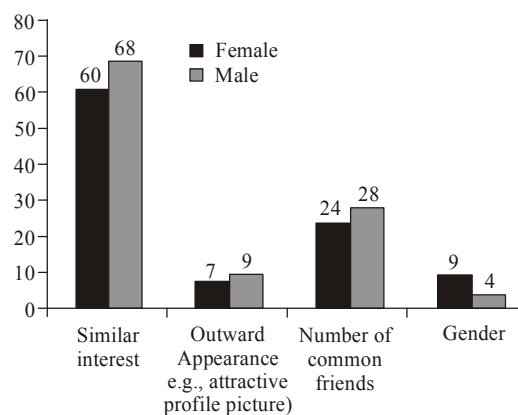


Fig. 4: Criteria for adding new friends in facebook

are essential for social interaction and knowledge discovery (Fig. 4).

DISCUSSION

Many researchers wonder whether olden theories are still applicable in social media communication (Louma-aho, 2010). Gen Ys acquire news from social media and publish their opinions in real time (Castells, 2009). As social media has become a hub for all social activities, the behavior of Gen Ys has surprisingly changed. Hampton (2012) cited that more women than men are traditionally in charge of social relationships (offline) and are now incharge of social relationships on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Pontiflex (2014) reported that women spend one third of their time using the Internet to communicate with others. Gen Ys adopt social media as a life companion in all aspects.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that many of today’s generation are registered to social networking sites, which have ultimately transformed their lifestyle. Social media imparts knowledge, influences decisions, provides a means of communication, users to promote themselves. Meanwhile, social networking sites have been increasingly used by business organizations and educational institutions to understand the demands of their future clients and to prepare themselves for new

challenges. In the future, social media is expected to become part of everyone's life and shape individual behaviors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite its simple and descriptive nature, this study provides a new area of study that can be explored in the future. The findings indicate that social media will slowly shape the attitude and behavior of the future generation. Further study may be conducted to gain knowledge of the specific behavior of Gen Ys toward social media networks.

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