

## **EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON THE LIFESTYLES OF YOUTH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Youth today are inclined to use social media as a means of transmitting knowledge through a variety of social networks and media. The use of social media can indirectly engender a positive effect by promoting desirable changes in morals and culture among users. Nevertheless, social media can also be misused, leading to negative outcomes affecting youth and the general community. This study was undertaken to determine the effect of social media usage on the lifestyles of youth. A quantitative approach was employed, with data collected from 82 students of the Universiti Kuala Lumpur-Malaysia France Institute (UniKL-MFI), Bangi, Malaysia. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 35. The questionnaire-survey focused on the impact of social media on youths who utilized this facility on a daily basis. Hence, the effects resulting from social media usage have been shown to influence the lifestyles of youths in terms of their activities, interests and opinions. The study results showed that the lifestyles of youths were impacted in different ways and to varying degrees. At the top of the list was the influence of foreign cultures and trending topics, followed by the adoption of virtual social interaction, freedom of expression, acquisition of contacts unknown to them, health issues, privacy and security issues, and the preference of electronic gadget-based games over outdoor activities.

**Keywords:** Community, Lifestyle, Social Media, Technology, Youth

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media is among the more impactful developments in the field of information and communication technology today. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a grouping of Internet-based applications built upon the ideology and technology of Web 2.0 which enables the creation and modification of content by the user”. The number of people on social media keeps increasing and this has brought about tremendous changes in the lives of both rural and urban folk; day-to-day use of social media is now the new normal. According to Sohana (2016), development in the sphere of information technology has brought about a revolution in communication, or what some refer to as an ‘explosion of communication’. In this era of globalization, social media has positioned itself as a prime mover of information proliferation because through this technology, all boundaries that segregate information have been abolished. Anderson and Taylor (2013) state that globalization is the process that broadens networking and inter-dependence between one society and another. As nations communicate and interact, economic linkages are forged, with social media playing a key role in their survival and prosperity (Taylor, 2013).

Unlike traditional media like the radio or television, social media has interactive features; through social media, we can interact with another party in real time (Leonard, 2016). The channel of digital communication allows the sharing of information, instantaneous interaction, two-way

correspondence and messaging to multiple parties simultaneously. Social media is the current platform that simplifies life for all (Hudson et al. 2014). Ziani et al. (2014) characterize social media as a tool that assists in the transfer and receipt of information. With continuing improvements in this area, social media is seen as a useful and smart addition to the public space. Social media also offers further freedom to the individual or group to pursue various activities (Splichal, 2015). Essentially, it enables anyone to communicate with another party easily and quickly (Severin and Tankard, 2001) by taking advantage of spaces allocated to business, news, rapid publication, entertainment portals, video gaming, social networks, email and so forth.

The increasing use of social media has inevitably affected the lifestyle of its users, be it in a positive or negative way. According to the psychologist Alfred Adler (1929), lifestyle is a collection of behaviors meaningful to an individual and the people interacting with that individual at any given time and place, whether it concerns social setting, consumerism, entertainment or dressing. In essence, lifestyle concerns how an individual makes use of his or her time, or allocates such periods for a preferred activity. It concerns what the individual deems important, taking into consideration the environment and the individual's preferences, thoughts, and opinions. A definition by Assael (1984) incorporates the concept of AIO which means '*Activities, Interests, and Opinions*', this being a surrogate for the concept of lifestyle.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Social media usage and technology has long been a topic of many heated discussions. The wide use of electronic gadgets (commonly a 'smart phone') in social media has left an indelible mark on youths of today, this being especially true of the millennial generation. It is very much the current trend because so many users, irrespective of age, are attracted to social media as a fast and convenient way to obtain information as well as to share ideas and opinions.

### **Acquisition of Unknown Contacts**

According to Kammaruzaman (2014), netizens who surf the Internet social pages frequently acquire a lot of contacts unknowingly. The social network provides borderless access to its users, all of society, who can contact and communicate with whomever they wish. It is not uncommon for Internet social page surfers to accumulate thousands of contacts in a short time. The social media user can follow up to get to know better a new acquaintance online, while old contacts can be revived.

Through social media, an individual's activity online increases as more virtual acquaintances are added online. This avenue can be used to search for long lost friends, or keep in touch with the career development of friends, or contact friends to organize a reunion. Such tasks are greatly simplified through the use of this modern technology that saves time and effort.

### **Freedom of Expression**

Social platforms on the Internet provide opportunities for users to raise and share opinions related to current affairs or issues of mutual interest. Discussions between various parties can take place

on this platform, e.g. between friends, between teacher and students, between mass media and man-in-the-street, between artiste and fans, not to mention between governmental leader and citizens. According to Kammaruzaman (2014), social page users occasionally raise sensitive matters that can jeopardize the harmony and well-being of society. For example, sectarian articles would sometimes be posted on webpages that criticize government authorities, raising the ire of the latter. In countries with multi-racial populations, it is not difficult to stir up discontent and ill feelings when sensitive remarks are posted online. Indeed, social web pages can trigger the community sensitive feelings that may be difficult to quell.

### **Virtual Social Interaction**

Social interaction within any organization is important as it serves as a channel for the sharing of information and ideas. This mirrors a common practice of socialization among youths today. Rather ironically, social media that serves as a means of communication can also hinder communication between youths and society at large (Fauziah Hanim, 2013). Extensive internet use has rendered the youth numb to real-life interaction with others while limiting attention to oneself or one's group (Naquih Nahar, 2018).

Yong (2011) notes that captivation to Internet surfing has resulted in an addiction syndrome that, from the standpoint of pathological psychology, is tied to mental health. Excessive Internet usage leads to symptoms of depression that results in problems in social interaction. The impact of such behavior on the wellbeing in youths is not always obvious. Youths who are active in social media could, in fact, be introverts in the real world (Yong, 2001).

### **Health Problems**

The use of applications on Internet-based electronic gadgets over extended periods can lead to various health issues to the user, including problems with sight. According to a study by Noraziah and Fazliatun (2014), incidences of up to 85% in myopia have been reported in children in East Asia, Singapore and Taiwan due to constant close viewing of the gadget screen. Excessive use of gadgets to surf the Internet has also been identified as a significant contributing factor for obesity among children and teenagers (Naquih Nahar, 2018).

### **Problems of Privacy and Security**

Problems related to privacy such as those pertaining to a breach of security in bank accounts, telephone numbers, house addresses and so forth, have been raised by Kamaruzzaman (2014). Users of social media often do not realize that they are sharing such information with others who may use it for unauthorized applications and transactions. Identity theft is a prevailing problem, with Cybersecurity Malaysia (Mycert, 2019) registering 10,772 reports to MyCERT. Thousands of individuals and companies fall victim to increasingly sophisticated cyber-attacks every minute. Miscreants use a variety of sleek techniques such as social engineering or phishing via the Internet to target unsuspecting victims. They probe for weaknesses in e-mails, instant messaging, and so forth to enable access to other users' accounts and personal information.

## **Influence of Foreign Culture and Trending Topics**

Hasrul Hashim and Bahiyah Omar (2011) examined the impact on the Malay community when social media users received messages suggesting that the community was unwisely indulging in flagrant displays of modern living as depicted in social media, on television and movies. The implication was that Malays were gradually discarding their traditional cultural values and way of living. It is not only the Malay community that is affected by social media in this manner; other communities, especially among the youth, are not spared either. The millennial generation, in particular, are susceptible to following practices that trend on social media in order to be with the crowd. Such a development is of concern to the older generation who see this trend as an erosion of heritage that ought to be preserved.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study involved youths aged between 19 and 35 years who were students of Universiti Kuala Lumpur-Malaysia France Institute (UniKL-MFI). Non probability sampling was used since the objective of the study was not so much to infer conclusions that represented a population, but was specifically directed at investigating the effects of social media usage on youths studying in UniKL-MFI. The sampling was accordingly conducted among students from that institution. A quantitative approach was used through the distribution of questionnaires to respondents. The questionnaire instrument comprised two main parts, with Part A being concerned with items of demography of the respondents such as gender, ethnicity, age, educational level, marital status, religion, as well as the number of social media applications in their electronic gadgets. Part B contained items that investigated the effects of social media on the lifestyles of the youth. There were seven broad categories, namely the tendency to add unknown contacts, being liberal in offering opinions, non-face to face social interactions, health problems, privacy concerns, influence of foreign culture, and the trending interests and frequency of games played on the respondents' electronic gadgets, as compared to other activities. There were 46 questionnaire items in this section that used a five-point Likert scale to determine the extent to which the lifestyles of youths at UniKL-MFI had been influenced. High scores implied negative values whereas low scores indicated positive values.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Effects of Social Media Usage on The Lifestyles of Youths**

Seven principal effects of social media usage on the lifestyles of youths were examined as shown in Table 1. These were acquisition of unknown contacts, freedom of expression, virtual interaction, health problems, privacy and security problems, foreign culture influences and trending topics, and preference for games played on gadgets over outdoor activities. These effects have been encountered in past research, but the present study was conducted to determine the more important

influencing factors in this regard, and also to examine various specific effects, as listed in the questionnaire, on the lifestyles of youths. Eighty-two students completed the questionnaires.

The study results (Table 1) revealed that the effects most prevalent among the youths involved in social media addiction were ‘virtual social interaction’ and ‘foreign culture influence and trending topics’, each garnering a mean score of 3.80. The former effect was evaluated through responses to the questionnaire statement: “When I am reluctant to meet someone face-to-face, I shall communicate via social media only”. The number of respondents agreeing with this statement was 28 (34.1%), followed by 24 who strongly agreed (29.3%), 23 who were neutral (28.0%), 4 who did not agree (3.7%) and the same number for those who strongly disagreed. Youths today freely socialize in a virtual sphere without feeling inhibited, shy or awkward. The preference for virtual interaction is often prompted by a lack of self confidence in face-to-face meetings. This could be due to a lack of maturity in many youths, while it could also be a personal preference for some who do not want to meet in person. Many youths turn to virtual interaction through social media as the first option for meeting with others, even when such meetings concern discussions over matters of importance.

Another major impact of social media was ‘foreign culture influence and trending topics’, which also attained a mean score of 3.80. This variable was represented by the questionnaire statement: “I love to follow attractive fashions on social media to guide me in my fashion pursuits”. The proportion of respondents who agreed to the statement was 39.0% (32 respondents), followed by 30.5% who strongly agreed (25 respondents), 17.1% (14 respondents) who remained neutral, 7.3% (6 respondents) who disagreed, and 6.1% (5 respondents) who disagreed strongly. This outcome indicated that many students at UniKL-MFI were ardent followers of fashion and trending topics on social media. More generally, this finding revealed the extent to which Malaysian youths were influenced by fashion, food, popular pursuits, and other interests of foreign origin. Keeping up with trends in fashion is viewed as a form of self-development. Social media influence some youths in this manner by raising their awareness of the fashion world and other topics trending on the Internet such as music, drama, movies, food and so forth, much of which are of foreign in their origin. Related items that are advertised on social media also catch the fancy of the individual.

The second highest mean score ( $M = 3.67$ ) was for the item ‘freedom of expression’ that was reflected by the statement: “I would love to have my shared ideas and opinions supported by others.” The proportion of those who agreed to the statement was 45.1%, or 37 respondents, the biggest number. This was followed by respondents who were neutral (28.0% or 23 respondents) and those who strongly agreed (18.3% or 15 respondents). Those who strongly disagreed made up 6.1% (5 respondents) while 2.4% comprised the remaining 2 respondents who disagreed. Whereas youths generally accept disagreements over their thoughts and ideas, they are especially delighted when those are accepted, supported and shared among their friends on the social media. Seeing their thoughts appreciated by others in their social grouping is a key attraction factor that pulls youths to social media in their daily lives. The greater the support their views receive, the greater their tendency to promulgate those ideas.

The effect of ‘health problems’ showed a mean score of 3.51 on the questionnaire. This was reflected by the statement “I am often troubled by the grip of my hand when grasping a gadget to surf social media on the Internet.” Respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed were 7.3%, comprising 6 persons in each case. There were 28 neutral respondents (34.1%), 24 respondents

(39.3%) who agreed and 18 others (22.0%) who strongly agreed. These results showed that weakness of the hand when handling a gadget can be a common occurrence among youths. Such a symptom arises from gripping the gadgets over extended periods spent on social media, without the user being conscious of the time. Even when they are lying in bed before sleeping, many youths would access social media or engage themselves in Internet games on their gadgets, oblivious to the passage of time. Subjected to such repeated stress, the over-used hand suffers injury over time. While such afflictions are rarely critical, long-term disabilities that progress insidiously cannot be ruled out. Such disabilities in the youth would obviously affect the lifestyles of the sufferers even if the effects are not drastic.

The influence of ‘acquisition of unknown contacts’ and ‘privacy and security problems’ shared the same mean score of 3.06. New contacts are added to the social media user without their identities known to them. Frequently, this does not bother the user who might not even be aware from which social media platform the contact is originally linked. Such new acquaintances can sometimes develop into close friendship. Respondents who agreed to the statement “I make close friends even though we did not know each other initially” made up the largest segment i.e. 35.4%, or 29 persons. The next segment of 22% (18 persons) comprised those who were neutral. Fourteen respondents (17.1%) did not agree, while 13 others (15.9%) strongly disagreed. The remaining 8 respondents (9.8%) agreed strongly. These results showed that a sizable proportion of UniKL-MFI students acquired new contacts via social media, some of whom went on to become close friends. The acquisition of new contacts over social media can rapidly increase the scope of the user’s social network in the virtual sphere. This takes place without the need for physical meeting, and new contacts can even bloom into lasting friendships.

‘Problems of privacy and security’ that similarly scored an average of 3.06 in the questionnaire include attacks on digital accounts such as bank accounts, telephone numbers, house addresses and other private information (Kamaruzzaman, 2014). The questionnaire statement “I have received calls from unknown persons informing me that I have won a prize” was used to investigate this factor. Here, the largest proportion of respondents comprised those who agreed (32.9% or 27 persons). This was followed by respondents who strongly disagreed (20.7%, 17 persons), respondents who were neutral (17.1%, 14 persons), and respondents who disagreed or strongly agreed (14.6%, 12 persons each). These results showed that students of UniKL-MFI were frequent targets of cold calls, some perhaps coming from cyber criminals who had access to the students’ personal information. Among such callers were those who informed the students that they had won a prize even though the latter might not have entered any competition to qualify. Much of the personal information available to hackers would have been lost through identity theft where unwary youths are targeted on social media.

Finally, the factor with the lowest mean score ( $M = 3.01$ ) was ‘preference for games on the gadget to outdoor activities’ that was reflected in the questionnaire statement “I choose to spend my free time on games on my gadget”. The highest proportion of respondents were 22 persons who were neutral (26.8%). This was followed by respondents who agreed with the statement (24.4%, 20 persons), respondents who disagreed (20.7%, 17 persons), respondents who strongly disagreed (14.6%, 12 persons), and those who strongly agreed with the statement (13.4%, 11 persons). The results suggested that a segment of the youth from UniKL-MFI set aside time for virtual games, whereas many of their institute mates did not follow a similar practice. The situation

arises whereby the extent by which lifestyles of the students could be affected by Internet-based games would depend on the inclination of the individual to indulge in such activity and the time allocated to it. Certainly, there would be students who would put aside time for such pursuits when they had time to spare. The fact that the student chooses such games in preference to other activities indicates that his or her lifestyle has been influenced by games on the gadget. Nonetheless, the fact that the mean score was low for this variable in the present study suggested that it was a relatively less serious influence.

Table 1: Effects of Social Media Usage on Youth

Effects of social media usage	Scale	N	Percentage (%)	Mean
Acquisition of unknown contacts - I make close friends even though we did not know each other initially.	Strongly disagree	13	15.9	3.06
	Disagree	14	17.1	
	Neutral	18	22.0	
	Agree	29	35.4	
	Strongly agree	8	9.8	
Freedom of expression - I would love to have my shared ideas and opinions supported by others.	Strongly disagree	5	6.1	3.67
	Disagree	2	2.4	
	Neutral	23	28.0	
	Agree	37	45.1	
	Strongly agree	15	18.3	
Virtual social interaction - When I am reluctant to meet someone face-to-face, I shall communicate via social media only.	Strongly disagree	3	3.7	3.804
	Disagree	4	4.9	
	Neutral	23	28.0	
	Agree	28	34.1	
	Strongly agree	24	29.3	
Health problems - I am often troubled by the grip of my hand when grasping a gadget to surf social media on the Internet.	Strongly disagree	6	7.3	3.51
	Disagree	6	7.3	
	Neutral	28	34.1	
	Agree	24	29.3	
	Strongly agree	18	22.0	
Problems of privacy and security - I have received calls from unknown persons informing me that I have won a prize.	Strongly disagree	17	20.7	3.06
	Disagree	12	14.6	
	Neutral	14	17.1	
	Agree	27	32.9	
	Strongly agree	12	14.6	
Foreign culture influence and trending topics - I love to follow attractive fashions on social media to guide me in my fashion pursuits.	Strongly disagree	5	6.1	3.80
	Disagree	6	7.3	
	Neutral	14	17.1	
	Agree	32	39.0	
	Strongly agree	25	30.5	
Preference for games on the gadget to outdoor activities - I choose to spend my free time on games on the gadget.	Strongly disagree	12	14.6	3.01
	Disagree	17	20.7	
	Neutral	22	26.8	
	Agree	20	24.4	
	Strongly agree	11	13.4	

It can be seen, overall, that the various influences of social media on the lifestyles of youths in Bangi, as represented by students at UnkKL-MFI, were the acquisition of unknown contacts through social media, freedom of expression (sometimes with consequences for irrational opinions that had not been well thought through), virtual interaction, health problems (including problems of sight, body functions and insomnia), problems of privacy and security, influence of foreign culture and trending topics, and preference for games on the gadget over outdoor activities. The findings from this study suggested that the various influences of social media usage were only moderate, as shown by their mean scores in the questionnaire survey. While detrimental effects of social media were not severe on the whole, there were, nevertheless, students' lifestyles that were already adversely affected. These youths experienced changes in their interests, thinking and allocation of time for various activities. Although not alarming at the moment, incidents of adverse effects may gradually rise over time, especially where social media itself changes with advances in technology. It is still to be seen how far youths would allocate their time and effort between activities associated with social media as opposed to other activities. The extent to which the youth are receptive to opinions introduced and shared in social media is similarly something to watch out for. In any case, the influence of social media on youth has to be carefully tracked so that any ill effects can be identified early and not allowed to undermine youth development.

## CONCLUSION

Various effects arising from social media usage on the lifestyles of the youth in Bangi were examined in this study. The strongest influence came from *Foreign culture and trending topics* which garnered a mean questionnaire score of 3.80. Apparently, the world of fashion held the attention of many of the social media users, and it can be surmised that considerable expenditure would be consumed in clothing and accessories appearing on the social media pages, either as items shared with members of the group or as related advertisements. Dressing is considered a feature of personal grooming where a good sense of fashion and accessories presents a favorable first impression. Much of such fashion trends on the Internet are foreign in origin, having arisen both from the West and the East, the latter especially with styles related to Korean Pop culture. This development gives rise to the situation where youths could be drawn to foreign behavior and culture at the expense of local traditions and customs. While it is undeniable that social media has a place in the daily lives of the youth, misuse of the Internet could bring about addiction to social media owing to its absence of access barriers and ease of use. The results showed that social media enabled youths to have a wider access to information in various fields, giving them greater exposure to external culture and to developments trending worldwide. This implies salient changes in the cultural tendencies of youths relating to various aspects of their interests such as fashion, movies, food, drama and so forth. There is no denying that each of these factors wields an impact on both society and the environment.

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