

SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT SZENT ISTVÁN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: Over the last twenty years social media and networking have gained popularity and interest among the young, middle aged and elderly. It can be declared, however with caution, that it is the young who are connected to the social media the most. A current V4 no. 21820245 international research included a comprehensive focus group qualitative research on social media and trust building. Research was carried out in 6 focus groups at Szent István University, in Gödöllő and Budapest, Hungary, in October, 2019. The study provides an answer to the issues of why students use social media, how important they find self-presentation, networking and informationseeking in the social media, how fun it is for them, and what dangers they need to be aware of. Most of the answers were well expected by the researchers, however, some of them were contrary to the expectations.

Keywords: focus group research, negative impacts, positive impacts, social media, social networking

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years social media and networking have gained popularity and interest among the young, middle aged and elderly. It can be declared, however with caution, that it is the young who are connected to the social media the most. They use social media for several purposes of which social networking seems to be the most important and leading cause. According to James Mageto (2017) these social sites impact the lives of our youth in a society a great deal in terms of morals, behavior and even education-wise. The purpose of this study was to examine social networking among university students at Szent István University, Gödöllő, Hungary.

1. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

1.1 Definitions

Firstly, the meaning of the terms social media and networking should be defined. According to definitions, social media are „websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone”¹.

Another definition focuses on the interaction among people which social media facilitates: “(social media is) interaction among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks”².

¹ Cambridge Dictionary, Social media. (2019, October 24) Retrieved from:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/social-media>

² Oxford Learners Dictionaries, Social Networking (2019, October 24) Retrieved from:
<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/social-media?q=social+media>

The European Union terminology database provides us with a comprehensive definition of social media because it defines them as tools, their applications used for social interaction and other communication practices as follows: „Social media services and tools involve a combination of technology, telecommunications and some kind of social interaction. They can use a variety of different formats, for example text, pictures, video and audio. The term ‘social media’ is applied to the tools in question, their applications and collaboratively developed practices.”³

To sum up, social media is a tool for collaboration and sharing through „a virtual community, a profile site, a social network, a website that brings people together to talk, share ideas and interests, or make new friends. Unlike traditional media that is created by no more than ten people, social media sites contain content created by hundreds or even millions of different people.”⁴ This definition emphasizes that social media and networking are created by a big group of people to make new contacts.

Table 1 below gives a summary of some of the social media networks and their profiles.

Tab. 1 Social networking platforms and their profiles

Facebook	The most popular social networking websites on the internet. Facebook is popular for users to set up personal profile and communication with friends, share pictures, share movies, talk about what current activities, etc.
Instagram	A photo sharing application.
LinkedIn	A website to find a better career, connect with coworkers, and potentially future employers. For employers to find employees.
Google+plus	Social networking service from Google.
MySpace	Social network.
Pinterest	A popular picture sharing platform.
Tumblr	A platform for microblogs to social network.
Twitter	A platform that allows users to post 140 character long posts to give snapshot of the events around them.
YouTube	A platform to share videos, video blogs or vlogs.
Snapchat	An image messaging service and application.

Source: <https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/s/socinetw.htm>.

1.2 Why do people use social media and networking?

As the definitions above indicated social media and networking help people keep connected with their friends and family. But apart from this, they provide a fast and easy way to communicate with people about current events and to inform about what everyone is up to each day in their jobs, private lives, in politics, in other social circles. An important feature of social media is that posts and news can be commented immediately which turns the use of social media into an interactive online dialogue, in which feedbacks and reactions are fast. Also it is easy to find fun and interesting things on the internet since friends share many of the same interests as you, such as the latest news and events, educational issues, breakup of a love story, etc. As is seen above, social media do not only connect people, they provide community, social, business and personal communication and fast interaction among people which is termed as social networking and defined as „communication with people who share your interests using a website or other service on the Internet”⁵.

³ IATE, European Union terminology, Social media (2019, October 31) Retrieved from: <https://iate.europa.eu/>

⁴ Social network, Computer Hope (2019, July 06) Retrieved from: <https://www.computerhope.com/jargon/s/socinetw.htm>

⁵ Oxford Learners Dictionaries, Social Networking (2019, October 24) Retrieved from: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/social-networking?q=social+networking>

1.3 The difference between social media and networking

Some people tend to think that social media and social networking are the same, but this is not so. Social media is the use of web-based technologies to communicate through interactive dialogues. Social networking is a social structure in social media with people who are joined by a common interest. Social media can be used for social networking. In other words, social media helps people to connect, whereas social networking enhances that connection by having common interests, passions, etc.

1.4 Positive and negative impacts of social media networking

Today social media is so popular that according to some vague statistics people spend almost two hours per day on social platforms networking, young people almost 30 hours per week. The effects are not always positive, sometimes they are more than negative.

Positive impacts of social media networking

The positive impacts of social media networking on the youth include making them up to date on the events happening in the world, it enables them to network and stay connected with friends who may be in a far away place, without meeting them physically. According to Brignall & Valey (2005), Fleming & Rickwood (2004) cited in Juszczuk (2015), social networking provide young people with the opportunity to talk to friends with whom they share interest even if they are remote. It allows them to develop social skills and make new friendships. It strengthens relationships with groupmates in school, college or university. Social media make communication enjoyable, efficient and easy.

The social networking sites provide the basis for scientific and academic research that were unavailable before. Social media enables students to collaborate easily and discuss the assignments of the school. It offers opportunities for learning, responsibility, and independence. Students can learn to manage their time and resources effectively, master the skills of accessing and processing information, critical thinking, and communicate this information clearly to the intended audience. Integrating online information with professional communication allows students to share personal perspectives, knowledge, experiences, and structure discussions for debate claim Wakefield & Rice (2008), Juszczuk (2013, 2015). Young people may get the inspiration to participate in politics, community events for example to vote in an election or join demonstrations or confirm or change their political beliefs and ideas. Since online news spread through social networking sites, they may get the latest news from a social media platform fast and easy. They may have access to different news portals so they can check and compare the reliability of the news.

Social media is one of the best ways for employers to find employees and those who are in search of new jobs.

Negative impacts of social media networking

Unfortunately, social media networking has a few negative impacts. For most people, to check their social platforms has become a priority and they like to be in the social media and forget family, sports and studies. They may develop addiction to and obsession with social media and become dependent on it say Shoaib and Nandi (2019). This may result in social isolation, the inability to communicate face to face, in person with peers and solve conflicts (Drago, 2015). Personal communication may become artificial and people tend to become introvert (Littlefield, 2004 Shoaib and Nandi 2019). This goes hand in hand with what Juszczuk (2015) and Duranti (1977) claim that internet users create their own reality in which they live and get away from real world. Also, the social media platform affects the productivity of the people because they check their facebook profile, etc at school and during work.

Young people are easy to get influenced, they compare themselves with others, such as influencers and they may want to be like them and change. In social media the virtual side of the person is presented because people portray their ideal features and only those which they want us to see. They never show their negative sides.

The excess use of social media may destroy their written language skills, spelling and oral communication skills such as face to face communication claim Shoaib and Nandi (2019).

According to Juszczak (2015) there is increasing temptation to harass peers because no personal repercussions exist, which creates cyber-bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Waligóra-Huk, 2012 cites in Juszczak 2015), cyber-stalking, cyberharassment conversations, public personal attack, verbal aggression. Young people sometimes bully their peers online, without seeing the consequences which may be sadness, separation and loneliness, the loss of selfconfidence and though rarely, suicide.

Young people are often too open in the public and share their personal information without bearing in mind that these information may be misused by institutions or private people for sexual abuse or misconduct (Olsen 2016).

False information, such as collecting money for a non-existent sick person or poor family, or misleading advertisement may cheat and mislead them. Young people have access to immoral pictures and videos which may distort their morals. Also, political or religious groups may reach and influence them suggest Shoaib and Nandi (2019).

Social media help students to cheat on school assignments such as academic research.

To sum up, using social media in a careful way is constructive and has a lot of and unlimited advantages, but they should be handled with caution.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Questions

Research questions were determined based on the definitions and literature on social media and networking which allow to get a broader picture of the study area.

The study provides answers to the following central research questions:

1. Why do you use social media? What interests you in the social media?
2. How important is self-presentation for you in the social media? What do you think of self-presentations in the social media?
3. How important is using social media for networking, creating and maintaining relationships with others for you?
4. How fun and entertaining is social media networking for you?
5. How important is information seeking through social media networking? What kind of information do you search in the social media?
6. What are the dangers of social media networking?

2.2 Research methodology

A current V4 no. 21820245 international research included a comprehensive focus group qualitative research on social media and trust building. All the four countries, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, carried out research using the same research focus and research questions.

In total, research was carried out in 6 focus groups at Szent István University, in Gödöllő and Budapest, Hungary, in October, 2019. Participants were university students studying in different academic study programmes. The focus groups consisted of 8 to 12 student participants and the focus group research usually took from 60 to 90 minutes. Due to the optimal size of the focus groups, rapport was created among researchers and students and a smooth, fluent and candid conversation which enabled the moderator to follow and stick to the research focus.

The focus group research is a qualitative research method used in sociology and marketing research the most. This methodology gains indepth information about the thoughts, ideas and experience of the research population. Data collected by focus group research substantially differ from the data collected by quantitative methodology. It is a more inclusive method which adapts to the unexpected thoughts of participants and directions of the conversation emerged in the course of the focus group research, thus bringing up unexpectedly new and innovative topics, results and findings. Consequently, answers and findings may be diverse making statistical standardization problematic. The methodology relies on the interaction among participants in the conversation which is called group synergy (Kitzinger 1994). Wilbeck et al. (2007) argue that the focus group data collected during the interactions among

participants are rarely analysed, discussed and assessed for empirical research purposes. This study aimed at the research and analysis of such data.

The reliability and validity of the data are guaranteed and enhanced with focused sampling through consciously selecting and choosing the research participants from the diverse research population (Erlandson et al. 1993). Our research used this methodology by involving carefully selected university students in the focus group research which enabled the researchers to collect a broad range of personal, comprehensive and diverse opinions, ideas, experience (Vicsek 2006). The methodology provided the researchers with a big amount of concentrated and focused data collected within a short period of time, which is a big advantage and makes the research extremely effective. The research design adopted the methodology of Liamputtong (2011) who suggests the participation of a notary who also takes notes in course of the research, parallelly with the moderator. This way a draft interpretation of the collected data is set up mapping the difficulties, strengths and weaknesses together with the difficulties of the focus group (Váradi 2008).

3. RESULTS

Our first questions were about their interests in social media. We asked them what they are interested in on social media sites. It was fascinating that they pointed out that in addition to the quite typical topics (for example news, fashion, parties, football, travelling) our respondents are interested in scientific news, film reviews, stock exchange news, the publication of a new book, interview with a famous person, news about a global event, some sort of disasters or something negative, bad or shocking, if the event directly influences the future of Europe e.g. Brexit. Some also emphasised that they are really interested in technological innovations, and basically everything that contains something “really new”. It was really worth mentioning that they are not interested in politics as it is boring and mostly fake news, road accidents or sensational titles, where the title is written with only capital letters and suggests some very big sensation, but the article itself is fake or boring.

Answers vary from less important and typical to very important to the next research question which was about how important information seeking on social media is for them. Few students use social media only for information seeking (e.g. education, sports, if there are too many followers to a website, it cannot be fake), others use this function very rarely. They normally do not search anything only if they hear about it or news pops up. They use Facebook, Google or LinkedIn for this purpose and check the news on other sites or search engines.

What our respondents answered to the next question was a little bit surprising. We asked them how fun and entertaining social media is for them. We expected – as they are all members of generation Z, which basically grew up using social media – that they will say it is really entertaining. But the truth is that they have mentioned that it is a good thing to chase away boredom, and it must be entertaining because lots of people watch it, but for them only the good memes (troll football, school memes, funny videos), which pop up randomly or recommended by friends and acquaintances are funny or relevant if they reflect our situation in life. They do not like making fun of for example minorities, gender, or religion, holocaust, disasters, politics, protests, global warming etc. They find it really disgusting, and never watch them.

If they are personally involved in an event or news, they seek the relevant information and news until they find them. If they need particular data, they seek data on the net e.g. for some data that is required for their research. They surf on the internet without any particular purpose, if they have some free time and read what comes up on the net. They follow influencers and latest fashion trends.

Self-presentation in social media is also a big question nowadays as in our research. One of the first things they mentioned was they deny the saying if we do not post, we are not alive. Our respondents confirmed that only true and real things should be posted on social media platforms, it is not important to create a better picture or impression. They mostly post pictures on Instagram.

Those who spend more time on Facebook are more likely to think that Facebook’s “friends” live a better life”. They only post if they were at an interesting programme, otherwise it is boring to make a selfie for example about your breakfast or while having a rest at home. “While the young share their happiness,

the elderly create posts to show their sadness” they said. Posts should not be too individual; they should rather give a general picture in their point of view. We felt during the focus group interview, that Instagram takes over Facebook: “the first one only contains colourful and interesting news while on Facebook there are posts about everything, it makes no sense, and there are too many comments, arguments, adverts”- said the respondents. They think Facebook is too boring and they are not at all concerned in sharing posts.

We asked them at the end of the focus group research how important using social media for creating and maintaining relationships with others was for them. –.

Most of them keep in touch with old friends and acquaintances and do not use social media to make new contacts. They mentioned that it is the feature of Tinder.

They discuss school issues (group messaging, Messenger, Viber, Instagram, My VIP, Skype etc.) According to some students, that is what social media is for. They are mainly in touch with one another and not with teachers: they use emails for communicating with teachers. They feel that way a little bit more official, not so personal. Sometimes teachers create groups on Facebook to share pictures of the class, events or topical issues (homework). Students are familiar with this, and they like it. They do not write to strangers or not even add them as friends or accept strangers’ notations.

CONCLUSIONS

All in all, we can conclude, that our “Social media and trust building V4 no. 21820245” research with six focus group interviews was a niche research. It is important that we did not seek to express the opinions of one person but of a group affected by the problem we were focusing on. Respondents are focused on problem solving and suggestions for solutions. We were pleased that our respondents, who were our university students, were really open minded, and willing to share their opinion and knowledge with us. The findings of this study provide a better understanding of the social media usage of generation Z, their knowledge about the topic, their understanding of the operating mechanism of social media, and the relevance of it in their life.

The results revealed that our preconceptions are not always correct. For example, about posting habits, or how they really use different apps in social media. During the interviews we faced the fact that generation differences can be identified very clearly in using social media. Generation Z is not looking for the same news or articles as elderly generations are, and their behaviour is also completely different in this case. They were born into this new, multitasking, modern world, and the affection of this is phenomenal.

We can also add that this research is very up-to-date, and still has a lot of untapped areas, so we would like to continue our exploration with more respondents, and maybe more, or “deeper”, more specific questions.

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