Born 2B Connected: Digital Natives' Attitude and Behavior towards Socializing Online

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Digital natives (Palfrey and Gassers 2008) or net generation (Oblinger and Oblinger 2005) have brought us new business opportunities for companies now develop marketing strategies. The paper will analyse how online socialization work for digital natives and draw out implications of the combined analysis of digital natives. Objectives of the research are to understand the habit of youth digital usage, especially smartphones and mobile internet.

Keywords: digital natives, socializing online, consumer attitude and behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

Mobile messagings have shifted from a static web towards a dynamic and interactive flow of information exchange, influencing how we experience, interact and organise human activities (Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2009). This changes how companies do business (Schlosser, 2003) as it increases sales transactions (Dahlen, Rasch, and Rosengren 2003) and changes consumers’ attitude and behaviour. Companies now interact with customers via websites (Van Riel et al, 2001) and social media. Researchers have started to reposition the issue as it goes beyond a “yes/no” question to what kinds of relationships people build with the Internet (Jung, Kim, Lin, & Cheong, 2005).
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 SOCIETY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Mobile Internet has changed the way how companies broadcast their messages. Children born in the 1990s are equipped with the online concept of ‘ladder of opportunities’ (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Runnel, 2012). Computer activities provide support for offline friendships, bring out online identity (McMillan, & Morrison, 2006) and may affect children’s decision making process.

2.2 BORN DIGITAL - THE CHARACTERISTICS OF DIGITAL NATIVES

Digital natives’, according to Palfrey and Gasser (2008), are born after 1980, highly involved, spending 8 hours or more a day in a digital network, while ‘Tapscott (2009) indicated that the “Net generation” (Wang et al. 2012), is smarter and more tolerant of diversity than predecessors. They are described as having positive attitude, seeking for empowerment and self-satisfaction through the online activities (2010). Technological process enables the young generations to move up on ‘wisdom food chain’ (Tapscott 1988) with their personal identity (McMillan, & Morrison 2006) and creates ‘digital fluency’, which is the ability to express the creativity appropriately online (Wang et al. 2012). They are all being labelled as tech-savvy generation (Pren-sky 2001a; Tapsott 1998).

2.3 THE EMPOWERED DIGITAL NATIVE

Young people who are with fluid lifestyles in the contemporary society are portrayed as a ‘multitasking generation’ (Wallis, 2006, Foehr, 2006).

2.4 INTEGRATED INTERNET MARKETING

Mobile marketing through online facilities are powerful tools to assist managers in communicating a unified image via signs, word of mouth, personal experiences, and public relations.
2.5 SOCIALIZING ON THE INTERNET

Evolving technology allows people to keep in touch frequently, express their thoughts and communicate (e.g. Hjarvard, 2003). The Internet is presenting as “personalization” of activities and services (Green et al, 2006). Socialization describes the customs and language unique to a particular culture while online socialization can be conducted by emails, instant messages, and video calls.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

3.1 OVERVIEW

This study is a qualitative descriptive research, investigating young generation’s digital usage trend. Fieldwork was conducted between June and September 2014 with a total of 660 addresses sampled by purposive sampling method, drawn from the official government household registration record, which was the most authoritative sampling frame available. The targeted group are aged between 12 and 17 from different backgrounds and recommended by schools. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a structured questionnaire, asking for respondents’ demographic background, internet usage pattern and attitudes regarding socializing online. The target group consisted of students from 40 secondary schools across different grades and classes.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper analyses the relation between socializing online and digital natives’ usage patterns and attitudes, focused on two empirically linked questions.

1. How usage volume correlates to socialization online?

2. How digital natives’ use the Internet for “expanding knowledge” and “getting more information”?

One study objective is to determine their attitude and usage pattern that shaped the
possibilities for socializing. The questionnaire also included their profile, level of computer literacy, time spent on the Internet and when they first owned a smartphone.

3.3 FINDINGS

Key findings on respondents’ profile will be reported first, then followed by the face-to-face interview findings on their Internet usage experience and preference.

3.3.1 Enumeration Results

1) Respondent’s profile and Personal Characteristics

![Gender of respondents](image)

**Figure 1 Gender of respondents**

2) Respondents’ Age and Gender

![Age group of interviewees](image)

**Figure 2 Age group of respondents**

The respondents aged from 12 to 17. More than 35% have attained senior secondary education while 36% have attained junior secondary education. Table 1 shows the
distribution of respondents by gender. A majority of 62.4% were girls aged 15, accounting for 44.8%.

3) Respondents’ Proficiency on socializing

![Level of their Digital Literacy](image)

**Figure 3 Level of their digital literacy**

The survey shows that 58.9% and 36% adolescents had intermediate and advanced digital literacy skills respectively. Adolescents in this century are considered digital literates.

4) Respondents’ time spent online for socializing purposes

![Duration spent online](image)

**Figure 4 Respondents’ time spent online for socializing purposes**

More than 31.1% spent 3-4 hours on the Internet (Figure 3) and 7.5% spent over 7 hours a day. The percentage difference was obvious when we look at “spending too much time online” (56%).
5) Views about their first experience socializing online

Figure 5 Respondents’ view about the first experience of online socializing

Most first got in touch with smartphones at the age of 10-12. 28.6% and 15% of the respondents socialized online for the first time when they were 13-15 and 6-9 respectively. Adolescents used the Internet and gained access to information at an earlier age.

6) Views on the impact of Socializing Online

Figure 6 Respondents’ view on the effect brought by socializing online

23% and 8.6% agreed that socializing online has helped them gain exposure and widened their horizons respectively, while 18.5% and 19.5% claimed that it has helped them in communicating online and understanding new technologies.
7) Respondents’ online socializing activities

![Figure 7 Frequency of Online Socializing Activities](image)

The statistics shows the frequencies of respondents conducting relevant social activities with smartphones. The time spent on learning online is positively correlated with that on socializing online, and it is found that smartphones are used statistically significant more frequently for entertainment purpose and to connecting with friends.

3.4 FINDINGS OF THE PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

The personal interview composed of six questions, assessing and discussing adolescents’ preferences on digital usage. Responses were analysed under five headings.

3.4.1 Summaries of the Focus Group Interviews

Three Focus Group interviews were conducted on July 9, Aug 12 and Sep 17, 2014. All the adolescents invited have been using smartphones to socialize on topics related to friends, teachers and families. Smartphones allowed them to keep themselves updated to news and trends and connected with friends. They also learned online things like cooking and inputting Chinese. Interviewees did not agree that smartphones would adversely affect academic performance. Some admitted being addicted to socializing online, and few spent more than five hours per day on socializing online with smartphones.
4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The analysis of young people with digital natives’ attitudes towards smartphones is provided below after the focus group meeting.

4.1 SOCIALIZING ONLINE BY USING SMARTPHONES

The young generation tends to use smartphones excessively with instant messaging and social network functions frequently and some feel uneasy if they cannot stay online.

4.2 RESPONDENTS SHOWED THEIR PREFERENCES DURING THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW AND SURVEY

The research found that digital natives spend most of their time on social networking, online games and TV dramas. Marketers could observe these behaviour patterns and develop more persuasive messages to influence buyers’ behavior when making decisions. Some people started using smartphones as early as 6-9 years old. Girls of 12-17 years old use mobile devices for more than 4-5 hours daily, mostly for emails, social network, games and messaging applications. They are more influenced by brands appealing to them. Usage patterns are quite different between digital natives and non-natives.

4.3 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Usage pattern of smartphones and socializing online will be studied as well as the attitudes and characteristics of digital natives, which are useful for marketers to develop efficient mobile marketing strategies. The representative sample size, the sampling methods were detailed based on validated measuring tools. Limitations of this questionnaire include lacking of questions about brands of connection and data about their addictive behaviour of online socialization. How companies respond to this new technological trend and capture the business potential shall be a major area of research in the future.