

Chapter 15

Examining the Psychosocial Dimensions of Young People's Emergent Social Media Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Social media usage among young people has grown astronomically, generating interest among a number of interest groups. This chapter fills a gap on social media psychosocial antecedents propelling high-usage behavior and the subsequent psychosocial outcomes showing in attachment to the social media. The chapter explored the emergent psychosocial needs driving young people's level of usage in social media and the consequences, among a population in Ghana. The findings revealed that young consumers' social media behavior could be greatly influenced by their social psychological needs, but individual psychological variables did not significantly predict usage behavior in social media. The findings also suggest that young people are more emotionally attached to social media, slightly attached cognitively and not attached behaviorally. This implies young people have developed some level of emotional involvement for the use of social media which could affect their well-being positively or negatively.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media comprises of various forms of internet based or web 2.0 platforms that allow users or the public to generate and share ideas, pictures, videos, information, interests, and other expressions. It is one of the most dynamic, interdisciplinary socially facilitated media of contemporary society (Hjorth & Hendry, 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Made up of five distinct types, including social networking sites, social news, media sharing, blogs and micro blogging, social media is transforming young consumers' behaviour as it has created a shift in how consumers use technology, connect with others, engage with brands and other social activities such as entertainment (Chuma, 2014; Pinto, 2015). Such level of advancement and accessibility is increasingly creating opportunities for high usage and the likelihood of psychological consequences (Bolton et al., 2013; Chiang, 2013; Wu, Cheung & Hung, 2013). Given its growing importance, the power of social media to influence consumer behaviour cannot be over looked. Studies shows that, at a global level, it has become a major medium through which businesses engage their customers and for multiple levels of communication in all social interactions (Kim, 2016).

Although social media usage can be found among different groups of people, the younger consumer generation has been found to be connected to social media to a higher degree and this has become the focus of attention by researchers (Chiang, 2013; Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley, 2014; Khan, 2017; Westlund & Bjur, 2014). The younger generation basically consists of those from the later generation of generation Y, born from 1980s to 2000 and described as millennials, and the generation Z who are described as totally distinct from previous generations of consumers or market segment. They are considered as a dominant consumer segment, brand conscious, technologically advanced and digital citizens (Abeeele, 2016; Bertel & Ling, 2016; Bolton et al., 2013; Kotler & Keller, 2013; MacCasland, 2005; Mascheroni & Vincent, 2016; Walsh, 2009). They spend a lot of their time on technology devices mainly smartphones, internet and social media for social connections, information and entertainment. They are considered technology lovers and multi device owners (Bertel & Ling 2016; Lien & Cao, 2014; Khan, 2017; Lin & Lu, 2011; MacCasland, 2005; Naumouska, 2017; Whiting & Williams, 2013). Consequently, young people have been considered vulnerable to excessive usage and behavioral outcomes of social media. Due to their prolific usage of social media, they are considered as the population of interest for new digital media technologies such as smartphones and social media (Babadi-Akashe, 2014). As social media assumes a high level of influence it is imperative to understand young consumers from different parts of the world.

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