


Usage Behaviors on Snapchat, Instagram, and WhatsApp: Between-Group Analyses

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to investigate usage behaviors of different age groups across popular social-media platforms and show what usage behavior is mostly utilized in each social media platform. A sample of 2,883 social media users was used to run a series of t-tests to support the research hypotheses. The findings show that young users (compared with old users) are more likely to use social media platforms for social and personal needs. In addition, across platform analyses indicate that users of WhatsApp (compared with Snapchat and Instagram) are more likely to use the platform for socially integrative needs (e.g., connecting with friends and family and talking), while Instagram and Snapchat users are more likely to use the platforms for affective needs (e.g., entertaining), personally integrative needs (e.g., enhancing self-expression and getting to know new people), tension release (e.g., escaping from boredom), and cognitive needs (e.g., seeking information). A more detailed analysis of age groups across the platforms are further discussed.

KEYWORDS

Age Groups, Instagram, Snapchat, Social Media, Usage Behaviors, WhatsApp

INTRODUCTION

Social media usage has grown exponentially over the last decade, especially with the vast development of mobile applications. Among the different social media platforms, Facebook is the leader of social media. Other popular social media applications are Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr, and Vine, while popular mobile-chat applications include WhatsApp, WeChat, and Facebook Messenger. There were an estimated 3.46 billion active social media users worldwide in 2019 (Statista, 2019). Although social media presence is dominating users daily activities, it is especially widespread among teens and young adults. It has become an essential form of communications for young individuals and thus has drawn researchers' interests in several disciplines including social psychology, communications, sociology, and marketing. By large, marketing field covers an increasing number of researches and articles that have addressed social media issues (Alalwan et al., 2017). This

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growing stream of research provides strong evidence that social media and their implications should be the center of attention for both practitioners and researchers.

In 2020, marketers are expecting to spend over \$102 billion on social media advertising (Statista, 2020) to engage their users and get them to convert to their brands. Social media has become an essential part of many marketing campaigns due to its influential effects. Despite the importance of social media as a communication channel for both business and individual users, little is understood about how and why users use new social media platforms and how these platforms affect users' lives. More importantly, most of the communication messages that have been directed toward users are randomly placed on social media platforms with very little knowledge about usage behaviors. The traditional paradigm of integrated marketing communications (IMC) suggests that marketers should send a unified customer-focused message using different promotion tools in order to intensify the message effectiveness on target segments and achieve organizational objectives (Boone and Kurtz, 2007). However, the tools and strategies for communicating with customers have changed considerably in the era of social media (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Given the distinctive designs and features of social media platforms, one may argue that, in the new paradigm of social media communications, marketers should develop unique strategies for each social media platform in order to match the usage behaviors of platform users.

Overall, consumers are turning away from the traditional media and demand more control over their media consumption (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). These consumers use social media to create personalized profiles and engage with their friends and acquaintances with no time or space limitations. The majority of consumers depend on social media applications to share views, give opinions, and generate content (e.g., information, photos, and videos) in order to stay in contact with their friends and informed about trending news or events (Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky, 2010; Kuss and Griffiths, 2011). Past research has demonstrated different social motives of Internet-communication users such as user's need to belong and self-presentation (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012). In addition, group identification, collective self-esteem, and keeping in touch with friends are other types of social motives for a continuous user engagement on social media (Floros and Simos, 2013; Kuss and Griffiths, 2011). Researchers have also shown that social media is a prospering environment for consumers who have higher levels of shyness and anxiety in face-to-face interactions since it is easier to fulfill social needs online than via offline communications (Banjanin et al., 2015; Steinfield, Ellison, and Lampe, 2008).

For almost a decade, academic researchers and practitioners have given much attention to consumer participation on social media (Alalwan et al., 2017; Kamboj and Rahman, 2017; Zhang and Luo, 2016). In addition, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) highlights researchers' interests in customer participation on social media (MSI, 2016). Most studies concerning customer participation on social media are mainly focusing on the conceptualization with little empirical evidence (Khan, 2017). The opportunity to strengthening the relationship with customers using social media has seen as a significant scholarly work (Kamboj et al., 2017). Marketers have emphasized their presence on social media to communicate directly with customers and increase customer involvement in the brand. Therefore, understanding customer involvement and usage behaviors on social media may assist academic researchers and marketers develop suitable communication strategies unique to social media platforms in order to effectively target customers.

The present research aims to describe usage patterns in three most popular and under-researched social media applications (i.e., Snapchat, Instagram, and WhatsApp). Specifically, the researcher will investigate how social media usage behaviors differ across age groups and social media platforms. In addition, the researcher will utilize the uses and gratifications theory to explain how social media fulfills different needs and wants. Although uses and gratifications theory has been researched extensively in the communications literature, it has received little attention in the marketing and social media literatures (Kamboj, 2020; Phua, Jin, and Kim, 2017). In fact, some researchers have argued that the "question why people use different features cannot truly be explained without the

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