Qualitative Findings on Youths Views on the Internet and Mobile Phone: The Case of University Students in Malaysia

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Abstract: The main attempt of this study is to explore the views of youth on internet and mobile phone particularly on the benefits these technologies usage and the problems that emerged from such usage. This is a qualitative study whereby data were gained based on 2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The FGDs were conducted among 2 groups of students of Faculty Modern Language and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia. Thematic analysis employed have confirmed most of the youth use both technologies to fulfill their needs on socializing and information and entertainment seeking. In addition to this, some of the youth place their concern on the problem of technology addiction which might worsen if preventive actions are being ignored. A number of discussions and recommendations have been highlighted and expectantly it can assist the concern parties in constructing strategy to further improve internet and mobile phone usage among youth in Malaysia.

Key words: Youth, technology usage, youth development, mobile phone, worsen

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of mobile and internet can be considered as one of the significant developments in the fields of communication and information technology (Plant, 2000). Such evolution has resulted in more sophisticated and advanced features on mobile phones such as phone mail, voice mail, games facilities, 3G mobiles, Multimedia Messaging (MMS) and internet access. Youth in Malaysia can be considered as heavy mobile phone users in Malaysia. According to Malaysian Research Institute for Youth Development (2013) in 2010, a total 6.7 million of mobile phone postpaid subscribers

and 26 million of mobile phone prepaid subscribers were recorded. According to Malaysian Research Institute for Youth Development (2013) more in 2010, a total of 97 million SMS (Short Message System) were sent by mobile phone users in Malaysia. In addition to this, Malaysian Research Institute for Youth Development (2013) has confirmed that a total of 12% of mobile phone users have made or received more than 20 calls per day while the other 32% have made or received between 5-10 calls per day.

According to the Internet World Stats (2012), Malaysia was placed at the sixth level for penetration internet (Table 1) where a total of 17,723,000 of internet

Table 1: Current data internet usage in Asia

Asia	Population (2012 Est.)	Internet users (year 2000)	Internet users (30/6/12)	Penetration (Population %)	Facebook (30/9/12)
Korea South	48,860,500	19,040,000	40,329,660	82.5	9,434,920
Japan	127,368,088	47,080,000	101,228,736	79.5	15,691,380
Brunei Darussalam	408,786	30,000	318,900	78.0	253,140
Hong Kong	7,153,519	2,283,000	5,329,372	74.5	4,037,620
Macao	578,025	60,000	366,510	63.4	210,720
Malaysia	29,179,952	3,700,000	17,723,000	60.7	13,078,320
Armenia	2,970,495	30,000	1,800,000	60.6	335,480
Azerbaijan	9,493,600	12,000	4,746,800	50.0	896,980
Kazakhstan	17,522,010	70,000	7,884,905	45.0	596,080
China	1,343,239,923	22,500,000	538,000,000	40.1	611,640
Kyrgyzstan	5,496,737	51,600	2,194,400	39.9	91,460
Maldives	394,451	6,000	134,860	34.2	134,860
Georgia	4,570,934	20,000	1,300,000	28.4	829,260
Indonesia	248,645,008	2,000,000	55,000,000	22.1	47,539,220

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Table 1: Continue

Asia	Population (2012 Est.)	Internet users (year 2000)	Internet users (30/6/12)	Penetration (Population %)	Facebook (30/9/12)
Bhutan	716,896	500	150,548	21.0	79,060
India	1,205,073,612	5,000,000	137,000,000	11.4	56,698,300
Laos	6,586,266	6,000	592,764	9.0	224,720
Afghanistan	30,419,928	1,000	1,520,996	5.0	331,720
Bangladesh	161,083,804	100,000	8,054,190	5.0	2,987,820
Cambodia	14,952,665	6,000	662,840	4.4	662,840

Internet World Stats, (2012)

users were recorded in Malaysia compared to China with a total of 538,000,000 users with 40.1% penetration rate. In addition to this, a specific research done by Malaysian Research Institute for Youth Development (2013) has confirmed that a total of 19% of youth in Malaysia age between 15-19 years old use internet daily compared to just 18% for those whose age between 26-40 years old.

No other device has been diffused, as rapidly as the technology internet and mobile phone but its social impact is unknown. This research aims to provide a qualitative research base for assessing the impact of the internet and mobile phone on university students in Malaysia. In particular, it examines the ways in which the internet and mobile phone affords perpetual social contact. The invention and diffusion of information and communication technologies are said to be revolutionizing their students lifestyle. Internet hotspot and wireless mobile devices increase their scope for flexibility by enabling the activity in campus life. To date, its widely believed that technologies like the internet and mobile phone are blurring boundaries between personal and student in campus life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is qualitative in nature where the data was collected via Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The 2 FGDs were carried out with students in Faculty Modern Language and Communication in Universiti Putra Malaysia. The FGD was conducted on 4 October, 2013 at Kompleks Mahasiswa UPM. The first FGD involved a total of ten members while the second FGD involves a total of eight members. The FGDs were conducted in dual languages Malay and English and consumed a total of 1 h 25 min for the first FGD and a total of 1 h 20 min for the second FGD. The respondents were categorized as youth based on the definition of United Nation (UN) who define youth as those whose age between 15-24 years old. The number of respondents was chosen referring to the quality of the data collected and findings as it was recommended in most qualitative methodologies. The researcher continued to conduct interviews until they believed that it had reached a point of saturation. The data gained then was analyzed based on thematic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the FGDs done, discussions on the findings with regard to internet functions, problems of internet usage, mobile phone functions, benefits of mobile phone and problems of mobile phone usage are highlighted. Within the result part, G1 refers to Group 1 while G2 refers to Group 2.

Internet: Under this section, discussions on internet functions, benefits of internet and problems of internet usage are highlighted.

Internet Function: Commonly, the internet is a leisure tool for the mass public and its can help user to store, transfer and generate the data.

Communication and information seeking: The basic of internet is to find the information and make a communication in a social life. Different students give different opinions for the purposes of their internet usage. Respondent G2_student D has informed researchers the purpose of his internet usage: For communication and search new information. It is a fast medium and an efficient communication.

Compared to informant G2_student D, respondent G1_student F has clarified that his main purpose of using the internet is for information seeking through news: News. Current information (G1_student F).

Respondent G1_student G has expressed his agreement with respondent G2_student D by stating the importance of communication to human live. Purpose point for communication because human cannot live without communication (G1_student G).

Benefits of internet: According to Jones and Xiao (2004), internet is a technology that has the power to revolutionize and the finding of this study is in line with it as most of them agreed that internet offers a lot of benefits to them. The one of the respondents have viewed internet as a tool for behavior and moral development as he stated:

It can help the behavior and moral development through a variety of cultures what researchers can see on the internet and around the world and researchers are able to evaluate ourselves forming good or bad (G1_student C)

Education: With regard to education purposes, most of the respondents accentuated that internet can assist them in completing their assignments. Via the internet, just simply by clicking the mouse, they can find variety of answers and one of the respondents have confirmed this by stating: For search sources for homeworks (G1_student F).

Respondent G1_student G has expressed his agreement with respondent G1_student F by stating, through You Tube website, I can learn for free (G1_student G).

Additionally by integrating technology in education, it can profit most of lecturers in this day as they can use email to send their notes and assignment to students. The one of the respondents has agreed on this by statin: I will check my email because most of my lecturer will sent handout through email (G1-student A).

Social networking: Social networking sites such as Friendster, Facebook and Twitter is creating the borderless world where they can create friendship with anyone regardless their geographical boundaries. Furthermore, the social networking provides them a better space to have an effective group discussion. In addition to this, the current technology known as video Blog or known as Vlogging where entries can combine embedded video with supporting text, images and others into multiple parts. One of the respondents has informed on the importance of internet as the medium for social networking, promotion activity campus without costing. Used social networking for discussion (G1_student I).

Entertainment: Internet and entertainment are always seen as an effective combination for youth. Entertainment in this modern day can be a therapy to reduce stress and tense. Drawing on the information provided by one of the respondents have confirmed on this, most youngsters used internet for entertainment purpose. Internet shape the users (G1-student A).

Others: In order to adapt with borderless world, more efforts have been placed to ensure people will obtained more benefits from the internet the recent one is business online. Most students agreed that business online is an effective way for those who want to start small business. Online shopping give more benefit to them as it inclusively saves their time; online shopping/pay bills (G1_student H). Another respondent has agreed on this by pointing; for business (G1_student C/E).

Problems of Internet usage: Albeit benefits offered, internet usage leads to a number of problems which include the users health both mental and physical. Over usage of internet can lead to poor time management while lead an individual to be inactive and antisocial person. A number of respondents have expressed their concern on the impacts of over usage of internet on their physical health: Fatigue brain (G1_student E).

Another student has expressed his agreement with this by stating: back pains (G1_student I). Albeit fatigues and back pains, it is quite surprising when one of the respondents claimed that over usage of internet can lead to obesity: obesity (all students G1).

In addition to the impacts of internet usage to their health, the respondents also expressed their concern on the technical problems related to internet usage particularly one related to the speed of the internet connection. The one of the respondents has clarified on this by stating; Inconsistent speed (G2_student G). Another respondent has agreed on this by stating: Slow connection (G1_student H).

Financial commitment to internet subscription is another problem that might result from students need for the internet. In some cases, students searching for part time job to seek extra money for their internet fees; overspending (G1_student I).

Despite the great advantages offered, excessive usage of internet will lead to a number of problems which include mental health problem such aspsychiatric illnesses (gambling and bullying), small systematic face-to-face psychiatric studies high rates of psychiatric comorbidity consists of mood and anxiety disorders (Black *et al.*, 1999; Shapira *et al.*, 2000). In these studies, problematic internet usage can be related to significant distress and functional impairment. Thus, it remains unknown whether this type of behavior represents a distinct disorder of another psychiatric illness (Shapira *et al.*, 2003). From the discussion, several problems were emphasized among respondents: Misuse. Its use is considered negative because teenagers overus (G2_student D).

One of the respondents has raised his concern on the problem of internet addiction among the students and to have such finding is not surprising, as Griffiths (2001) has confirmed the correlation between internet overuse and addiction. He stated:

Most of student nowadays were addicted with internet (G1_student F)

In another view by G2_student B, he concerns on the misuse of the internet among youth particularly with

regard to pornography surfing. Teenagers now more influenced by surfing the internet in terms of pornography (G2_student B).

In addition to the problems of internet addiction and pornography, overuse of internet also can lead to anti-social problem among the users where they are considering the internet as their close friend. One of the respondents has informed on this by stating; Outdoor activities is less because do not want to mix with people because it was fun surfing the internet (G1_student B).

It seems that respondent GI_student I has expressed his agreement with G1_student B as he viewed the internet can result in someone to be a passive individual when it comes to face to face communication; they are very active in social internet but they become passive when face to face (G1_student I).

Mobile phone: Under this study, discussions on mobile phone functions, benefits of mobile phone and problems of mobile phone usage are highlighted.

Mobile phone function: According to Campbell (2006), mobile phone has already become an important need for the teenagers. Doubtlessly, the vital functions played by mobile phone in this modern day cannot be denied. It has already become an important tool for the community. Albeit benefits for communication purposes offered particularly for calling and texting, mobile phone evolution has made it possible for the community to access mobile internet. Furthermore, mobile phone has its advantage in term of mobility. A smaller size of mobile phone has able people to carry it everywhere; a small tool for communication and easy to bring to anywhere (G1_student J).

Benefits of mobile phone: More than half the worlds population now has access to mobile phones. It is because the mobile phones are multifunctional devices and give more beneficial to user (Naomi, 2010). From the discussion, most of the student agreed that mobile phone is beneficial and most important for them. Now-a-days, they can use this communication device for emergency and safety purposes. One of the respondents has clarified on this: I think the use of mobile phones become important today to avoid emergency (G2_student G).

Doubtlessly, people in the current setting prefer to use mobile phone as it will enhance their safety aspects particularly at night, reasonable cost for instant information (e.g., phone numbers) to communicate with colleagues and family and for privacy (Aoki and Downes, 2003). Used smartphone for normal line, keeping notes,

writing notes, taking pictures and related to something I need. So, I see smartphone as a tool for it which is increase efficiency and effectiveness it depends on user (G2_student D).

Problems of mobile phone usage: Over usage of mobile phone can lead to a number of problems. Obringer and Coffey (2007), for example has accentuated that usage of mobile phone can effect disruptions in class, encouraging bullying other students and cheating in exam. This privacy issues also comes out where students can be photographed in restrooms and shared their photos via Bluetooth, MMS and others. As a result, the violated teenagers might feel ostracized and resulted in low self-esteem among them.

Despite these problems, some of the respondents also viewed the technical related problems as the main issue in using the mobile phone. One of the respondents have pointed out this issue by stating: Line problems (G2_student G)

In addition to this, respondent G1_student H has supported respondents G2_student G by accentuates on the ability of the battery to last longer; not last long enough battery. Like smart phone which is not smart (G1_student H).

In addition to this, one of the respondents also stated his concern on the privacy breach:

> Information can be easily stolen by someone who has access to it, privacy information, such as pictures and private information can be easily stolen (G1_student I)

CONCLUSION

In this study, researchers have focused on purpose and problems during the internet and mobile phone usage that relate to particular cases among university students in Malaysia. In general, a wide variety of information about the characteristics and pattern of youth usage for internet and mobile phones has been compiled. The youth as researchers know is a segment of society that has been active in transforming the application and use of digital technologies. Such secnario is not surprising as they have the ability to quickly absorb and learn anything that associate with technolgy usage. The usage of technology can result in a positive youth development though there are some negative effects that produced from such usage. Ravenscroft (2001) state that given that the pace of change of educational technology is unlikely to slow down, the need for relatively more stable and theoretically founded interaction models is becoming increasingly important.

Furthermore, youth describe usage of internet and mobile phones provide them room for emotional and social communications, particularly for cementing peer relations. Youth communications are regulated by peers or adults depending on place and time of day and that access to internet or mobile phone takes a central role in managing and inflecting that control. Given this perspective, researchers can understand that youths perspective for internet and mobile phone as an outcome of a wide range of factors. These include the unique expressive functions and styles of this form of communication, as well as certain economic and historical to this generation. All students agreed that both technologies between internet and mobile phone have their positive impact for their social life.

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