FILTERING SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION AMONG THE YOUNG: HOW TO BUILD AND NOT BREAK ONLINE RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT
Social media is undeniably forming part of our daily sources of information and news. As a communication channel, information sharing in social media is swift, easy, and at some point, problematic. With massive information being produced and consumed, targeted recipients of online content may use them for their advantage or may share them with their peers, family, or community. With the abundance of unreliable information disseminated in our social networks, how does the generation of today manage to reject information that does not reflect their own beliefs and values? How do they approach their social networks and involve them in the process of filtering information based on their initial evaluation when they talk about the authenticity of its source? This paper discusses the social media engagement of the young, particularly on how they protect their relationships and strengthen the importance of critical information literacy within their social media circles.

Introduction
Any individual who has access to social media and regularly spends some time browsing these sites will not miss the abundance of information shared rapidly online. In a worldwide survey of students who access the internet, it was revealed that they spend almost three hours a day using social media which is slightly higher than other internet users who spend less minutes.1 Young individuals, particularly students of generation Z are exposed to social media sites which expose them to a wide range of individuals whom they can interact with, both formally and informally. Giant social media, such as Facebook, give an opportunity for silent netizens to interact with no boundaries as long as the use of their app is not blocked by any restrictive government. A democratic and open government allows the use of any platform to share and communicate information among its citizens. Establishing relations online is a positive trait of social media as they help struggling students to unearth an unfamiliar social environment.2 The use of social media offers a learning and educational experience for students as they explore the online world. It gives them a chance to connect and socialize with their peers and educators, and fully express their thoughts without the fear of physical intimidation.
TRUSTING PEOPLE ONLINE IS ANOTHER CONCERN. PEOPLE MAY INSTANTLY TRUST A SOCIAL NETWORK POST IF THEY HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH A PERSON. PEOPLE TEND TO JUDGE ON WHAT THEY VIRTUALLY SEE EVEN IF THEY DO NOT PERSONALLY KNOW THE PERSON SHARING THE INFORMATION. THE FREQUENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA MAY INFLUENCE THE DECISION OF THESE INDIVIDUALS AND MAY LOOK AT THEM AS CREDIBLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION ALTHOUGH DETECTION OF FALSE INFORMATION IS RELATIVELY AND EQUALLY IMPORTANT.\(^3\)

As Pepitone\(^4\) noted, there has been an increased use of social media as an information source. Social media as new media can be a complex source of historical and political insights, although interpretation is challenging as brought by changing societal norms.\(^5\) Watson\(^6\) mentioned that countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Malaysia, and the Philippines use social media to gather news. During health crises such as the pandemic, people turn to social media to get health information on treatment and prevention.\(^7\)

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Since the pandemic began, most internet users, especially the young ones, became dependent on social media to ease away their fast-paced life and connect with their peers since schools and universities started remote classes. Almost four billion people are using social media worldwide.\(^8\)

The youth of today are easily influenced by what they see, read, watch, and particularly hear on online platforms. Social media target positive and negative emotions and behavior, and if one is not critically literate or cautious enough, one may develop a certain bias. With high and irrational emotions, our online relationships may lead to a disaster.

This study discusses the social media engagement of the young, particularly how they protect their relationships and strengthen the importance of critical information literacy within their social media circles. It reveals how the youth participates online with trust and judgement as their weapon to evaluate information.

**METHODLOGY**

Undergraduate students from three library schools were selected as respondents of the study. This research aimed to determine how selective library and information science students identify trust, evaluate, and challenge confirmation bias. The study aimed at establishing and understanding how young individuals maintain and build a positive online relationship without breaking them.

The questionnaire was modified to validate trust and judgement. It also tests confirmation bias and trusts toward news sharers of students as studied by Bringula et al.\(^9\) This was a survey study that focused on students’ experiences in online political participation and behavior when engaging in social media. Their social media participation was observed in the context of misinformation shared during the pandemic.
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Three groups of Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) students from three universities participated in the study. Respondents came from all undergraduate levels, from first year to fourth year students. Quota or convenience sampling was applied in this study and participation was purely voluntary.

A 5-point Likert scale measuring frequency, containing the options always, very often, sometimes, rarely, and never, was used. An online survey questionnaire, composed of ten social media engagement questions, was used as the tool for data gathering, and was distributed to the students to answer in a specified time period with options to answer them during their free time. The results of the survey were tabulated, getting the mean and standard deviation using SPSS v.28. A total of 55 students (32%) accomplished the survey from a possible population of 171.

Review of related literature

Information sharing spreads faster, and information-seeking requires critical evaluation in social media. Conover et al.\(^{10}\) mentioned that sharing and spreading of political content and advertising is best in social media as they find targeted individuals to receive such information. The democratization of online content paves the way for citizens to communicate, share, and connect with each other using social media.\(^{11}\)

Social media have become a common platform where one can easily get access to all sorts of information. It has become an avenue to gather primary sources of information. We even quote personalities, celebrities, or strangers and make a screenshot of them, and share it to our own accounts.

Categories of social media activities

Heinonen\(^{12}\) studied consumer behavior online and identified three social media activities. Each of us is a consumer of information and we have our own motivations for why we need specific information. There are many purposes why we go online and search for information. Below is a list of activities categorized as information processing, entertainment, and social connection. (Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Processing</th>
<th>Entertainment Activities</th>
<th>Social Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retrieving product information or content</td>
<td>Escaping the real world and relaxing</td>
<td>Social surveillance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting factual information</td>
<td>Becoming inspired, mood management</td>
<td>Collaborative experiencing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.
Categories of social media activities\(^{13}\)
Sharing and accessing opinions, reviews and rating | Entertaining oneself | Belonging and bonding
---|---|---
News surveillance | Self-expression | Being up-to-date
Applying knowledge | | Staying in touch

Information processing involves retrieving content, collecting facts, sharing, and accessing opinions, surveilling news, and applying knowledge. When a person wants to be entertained, one goes to social media to find interesting stories that inspire and uplifts his or her mood. This is a way to destress and find relaxation. We find pleasure in social media entertainment and in this situation, we fully express ourselves as to what we would like things to happen. People also use social media for networking. To a certain extent, we rely on the social media posts of our friends to gather real-time information. We are fond of checking what others are doing, and we are being updated on what is going on with their lives, even if we do not communicate to them. By seeing what others are posting, we gain new knowledge and virtual experience.

Seeking information on social media provides us with various updates. It may be about topics such as disaster outbreaks, health information, political news, and financial reports. As we continue to share, comment, or click on what we see or read on social media, we increase its engagement. Collectively, if we measure them, it is social media engagement. Social media engagement determines how much interaction we have created. Web 2.0’s purpose is to ensure users interact with one another, thus creating a participatory culture. In social media, regardless of whether we personally know the owner of the account or not, people start conversing, even with strangers.

**Use of social media in the world and the Philippines**

![Figure 1. Global social network penetration rate as of January 2021, by region](image)

*Figure 1. Global social network penetration rate as of January 2021, by region*
As of January 2021, Western and Northern Europe had the highest social media penetration rate with 79% (Figure 1). It is 25.4% higher than the global average. Southeast Asia registered 69%. This region includes countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia where social media use is high.

![Figure 2. Social media use in the Philippines](image)

The Philippines had among the highest number of social media users in the world with 78.5 million users. Filipinos spent at least 4 hours and 15 minutes navigating the Internet and had 80.85% market share on Facebook (Figure 2). These statistics show how aware Filipinos use social media.

**Challenges and Issues**

There are also challenges brought about by social media. These challenges affect our relationships as they target our emotions. Our social media behavior depends on what we feel and if we succumb to it without critically evaluating information, it may lead to a negative conversation. Some unavoidable content like the spreading of false information may not correspond to what we want, and if not managed properly, may lead to hateful comments. This is a phenomenon that divides people online. Hate speech covers all forms of expression that “spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.” This is a result of fake news being distributed rapidly on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

There are also issues in information sharing. The information shared sparks diverse opinions and may harm individuals or groups. It may build trust or otherwise. Sharing sensitive information may increase prejudice and strengthen our judgment towards others. Malicious intent to share information causes sensationalism. Some information shared also contains biases that are challenging to control.

Sterret et al. mentioned that “people will be more likely to trust a story and engage with it if it is shared by a trusted public figure than if it is shared by a public figure they..."
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don’t trust.” But how about if it is shared by a family member or friend? Are friends and family more trustworthy than public figures? Is it based on respect or love rather than trust? Duffy, Tandoc, & Ling\(^20\) added that fake news is the sole reason for undermining our online connections regardless of that the main purpose of sharing is building relationships. Taking judgements from the post of others and trusting what they post answers our confirmation bias with a news / information statement.

Results and discussion

Ten questions were asked to 55 undergraduate LIS students from three different universities and below is a summary of their responses.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretation of mean scores(^21)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.01 – 1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.01 – 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.01 – 3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.01 – 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.01 – 5.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 provides an interpretation of the mean score scale. This is derived from the 5-point Likert scale.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results of the survey(^22)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my immediate family members share, post, like, or comment something that I believe contains bias, fake, or misleading information, I call them out and talk to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my close friends share, post, like, or comment something that I believe contains bias, fake, or misleading information, I call them out and talk to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When someone not related to me share, post, like, or comment something that I believe contains bias, fake, or misleading information, I call them out and talk to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I judge my family based on what they share, post, like, or comment in social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I judge my friends based on what they share, post, like, or comment in social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I judge other people not related to me based on what they share, post, like, or comment in social media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not judge anyone based on what they share, post, like, or comment in social media.</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust my family even if they share, post, like, or comment a different view or perspective that is against mine in social media.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust my friends even if they share, post, like, or comment a different view or perspective that is against mine in social media.</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust other people even if they share, post, like, or comment a different view or perspective that is against mine in social media.</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students felt that there is a very strong need to call out family members and close friends when they share, post, like, or comment something that they believe contains bias, fake, or misleading information. With mean scores of 3.53 (very often) for family and 3.40 (very often) for friends, they take it seriously to tell them of their possible fault. For someone not related to them, they have a mixed feeling whether they must call them out or not as the result shows sometimes (2.78).

Students judge their family, friends, and other people based on what they share, post, like, or comment on social media. They scored them 2.11, 2.15, and 2.16 respectively which gives a mean interpretation of sometimes but almost rarely. The interpretation tells us that LIS students tend to be more careful when judging others based on how they behave online, and may not affect their relationship with them.

Students trust their family and friends even if they share, post, like, or comment on a different view or perspective that is against mine on social media. With means scores of 3.67 (family) and 3.40 (friends), students trust them very often. However, they sometimes trust other people even if they share, post, like, or comment a different view or perspective that is against mine on social media.

**Figure 3. Judging others**

[Bar chart showing responses to the statement: I do not judge anyone based on what they share, post, like, or comment in social media.]

55 responses

441
It is also note taking that students do not judge others based on what they share, post, like, or comment on social media. It has a mean score of 3.22 which translates to very often (Figure 3).

Conclusions

It is presumed that LIS students somehow understand what bias, fake, or misleading information are. But, this has not yet been tested. The goal of the survey is to understand their social media engagement with their social media circles. The survey investigated their relationship with immediate family members, close friends, and other people.

LIS students are more open when it comes to calling out their family members if ever they share, post, like, or comment on biased or false information. LIS students are reserved with their family members, as most of them never judge them based on what they share, post, like, or comment on. LIS students maintain high trust with their family members compared with their friends if they share, post, like, or comment on a different view or perspective from theirs.

We are reminded not to judge based on superficial characteristics, but can we avoid not judging our family and friends if their post opposes our own beliefs? If there is someone we know better, these are the people who we are with. But there seem to be other questions to answer. When can we say that we need to begin arguing with them? Do we have the right to judge them? Warner24 shared in her blog: “you can judge the behavior, but don’t judge the person. Try to appreciate others despite your differences.” But, up to what extent? Do we have the right to correct facts from fake? And if so, can we address it in a diplomatic and friendly way? Two recommendations are to always pause to reflect, and take the conversation offline. When people tend to judge in a positive manner, they have a better self-image or self-reflection and are always stable and kind-hearted.25

Notes and bibliography

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21–22. Tables are made by the author.
23. Figure is made by the author.

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