Chapter 97
Gender Difference in Perception and Use of Social Media Tools

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ABSTRACT

Research on gender difference remains a strong interest today because the gender equality issue has not been fundamentally tackled in many areas due to traditional and cultural gender values. However, on the technology adoption, especially social media tools usage, the gender difference is less prominent. The research study in this chapter was conducted in a higher education institution and data were collected from 1534 students in eight years (2009–2016). The purpose of this study is to find out if there are any gender difference in familiarity of social media concept and use of social media tools, and if the traditional gender values are affecting social media adoption. The results indicate that there is no statistically significant gender difference in media concept knowledge. Both genders were using the same top four social media tools. However, male participants have higher usage of resource-based social media tools, while females have higher usage on relationship building platforms.

INTRODUCTION

How did the gender values originate and why do these traditional values still influence people's behaviors today? Based on two origin theories (Archer, 1996) – evolutionary psychological theory and social structural origin theory, the evolutionary theory stresses that male and female have different adaptation ability to the physical and social environments during primeval times (Buss, 1995a, Tooby & Cosmides, 1992) "Men and women differ in domains where they faced different adaptive problems over human evolutionary history" (Buss & Kenrick, 1998 p.994). Because of these differences in evolutionary adaptations, male and female developed a different behavioral pattern, men are likely to develop strategies and skillsets favoring violence, competition, risk taking and striving for more resources to be successful; while women, due to the task of reproduction and domestic responsibility tend to develop an inclination to nurture (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Social structural origin theory looks at the sex differences from the perspective of social structure, different social roles and unequal treatment of women in the society.

Ridgeway and Diekema concisely stated that man's accommodation to roles with greater power and status produces more dominant behavior, and women's accommodation to roles with lesser power and status produces more subordinate behavior (1992). Dominant behavior features "controlling, assertive, relatively directive and autocratic, and may involve sexual control", while subordinate behavior "is more compliant to social influence, less overtly aggressive, move cooperative and conciliatory, and may involve a lack of sexual autonomy" (Eagly & Wood, 1999, p. 412).

Both evolutionary and social structural theories have strong ground in making the argument of the different human behaviors between genders. Some of this traditional value has become a stereotyped judging standard for what men can do and what women should not and cannot do. Women's Rights Movements starting in 1848 and second wave in 1960's have shaken the historical perceptions toward women. Women's participation in the social activities, assuming important leadership roles and joining different labor forces to become financially independent has greatly changed women's image in the society. Women are voicing their opinions in different media. However, there is still prevalent evidence that females are unfairly treated in many areas in today's society. The change is gradual and it takes efforts from both men and women to achieve true gender equality because the constraints either natural or social put in the disposition of gender roles in what they do and these constraints, to certain extent, help sustain the traditional gender value (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

In technology adoption, especially in regard to the use of social media technologies, the gender difference is less prominent than that in work place and social roles. The purpose of this research study is to find out if there are any gender differences in familiarity of social media concept and use of social media tools, and if the traditional gender value, either natural or social, is still playing any role in affecting social media adoption. Pew Research Center has been conducting digital media and social networking research for many years on entire population and provided a more comprehensive overview of social media use with general classification of information. Its data have become authoritative sources for most research on social media technologies. The uniqueness of this study as compared to Pew's research is that this study focuses on students in higher education, which is the most popular age group that uses social media. Since they are all educated college students, the variable of education as an important factor affecting internet and social media access does not exist in this study. The study covers a period of eight consecutive years from 2009 to 2016; the data are very helpful in comparing the gender difference in using social media tools and also in investigating the trend of the participants' preference and change in those eight years. The data are very important for documenting how social media has become an indispensable communication channel for people's daily life in modern time.

GENDEN DIFFERENCE IN EARLY TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

According to Roger's (1983) adoption theory, the process for adoption involves knowledge of innovation, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. So the knowledge is the first factor for innovation adoption, and it is not surprising that numerous research studies indicated that education level is positively correlated with the use of technology. Early technology adoption by individuals was strongly affected by managerial influences and organizations (Leonard-Barton and Deschamps, 1998; Kwon and Zmud 1987; Robertson and Gatignon 1986; Roger 1983). With higher employment and income rate of men than women, men definitely have advantage of accessing and using of technology.

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