Happy, or Unhappy? That's the Question: A Study on Social Media Use and Happiness of University Students

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ABSTRACT

Social media becomes a common communication tool for people to connect with the world. There are nearly 80% of Malaysian from different age have the experience of using social media. People use social media with various purposes. However, less attention has been paid on Malaysian university students' social media use and happiness although they are categorized as the generation who adopt with technology gadgets. This study aims to investigate the relation between social media use and happiness by detecting reasons of using social media, furthermore, to explain effects of social media to an individual's happiness. Sequential explanatory of mixed method research design is implemented in this study. There are 340 university students participate in quantitative research, whereas 10 persons involve in qualitative research. A questionnaire with five Likert scale and in-depth interview is employed for data collection. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient and in-depth interview are applied for data analysis. Result of this study reveals the relation between social media use to university students' happiness. Different level of happiness is identified based on the purpose for example, looking for friendship or connection, and communication in social media use. Besides, emotional reaction of students would be greatly affected by types of online content. However, majority of respondents agree happiness should be practiced in human's daily life activities but not retain solely in online platform.

Keywords:
Social Media Use, Happiness, University Students

Introduction

Statistic from Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in 2018 disclosed that out of 87.4% Malaysian Internet users, 73.8% of them have experience of using social media. Facebook and Instagram are the most used social media platform by Malaysian. The result also shows that 38% of teenager who were born after 1990s are social media users (MCMC, 2018). Teenagers who born during mid-1990s are known as "digital natives" because they claim as first-generation Facebook registered user in Turkey. Undoubtedly, Facebook is the most important and frequent used social media tool for these categories of young people (Akbuga, 2014). Working in the same vein, research from Haris, Majid, Abdullah and Osman (2014) show the similar finding as Akbuga (2014) under a different social context. According to Haris, et al (2014), Malaysian aged group refer to use Facebook as similar as young people. This is because Facebook has enlightened their life and bring enjoyment to them through sharing and posting photos. In fact, Facebook's function helps the old people access to information and connect to the world (Haris, Majid, Abdullah, & Osman, 2014). The incidence prompts the function of social media that penetrates into human daily activities, nonetheless, there is less attention has been paid on identifying the relation between social media and user's happiness.

Intention of using social media can be formed by various reasons, including friendship or connection, fulfillment to academical purpose, entertainment, and communication (Aksoy, 2018). Surprisingly, Ooi and Mohd (2016) disclose that Malaysian undergraduate students trust their Facebook friends rather than real-life friends. Besides, positive

response or information content will inspire positive emotion, as well as self-esteem (Fang & Gao, 2017; J.-H. Kim & Lee, 2010; Ooi & Hashim, 2016). Lin and Utz (2015) indicates that positive or interesting online post may induce a positive emotionality. People will have a good feeling after reading positive information or online post from their close friend (Lin & Utz, 2015). Emoticons which have been identified as online communication tool the effect to the intimacy between users and online mates. Indeed, the frequency of applying emoticons is paralleled to the number of information spreading on social media (Mustafa, Kandasamy, & Yasin, 2015)

However, using social media to monitor others online status leads to the decrement of happiness (Fang & Gao, 2017). Nonetheless, it is interesting to notice that volume of online friends could not guarantee happiness. This is because the users might not able be to know their online mate actual lifestyle (Chou & Edge, December 2011). Therefore, the statement from various study (Fang & Gao, 2017; J.-H. Kim & Lee, 2010; Ooi & Hashim, 2016; Chou & Edge, December 2011) indicates the existing research does not sufficiently cover that effect of friendship or connection on social media to users' happiness.

Since social media has occupied Malaysians university student's daily life activities, it symbolizes life necessity such as sunlight, air, and water. However, the effect of social media to an individual's happiness is varied from one person to another. To acknowledge the gap, this study aims to investigate the relation between social media use and happiness, through identifying the hidden reasons of using social media, and studying on how social media affects to an individual's happiness. The finding intends to create awareness for educators to have a better understanding to student's social media usage and happiness.

Objectives of the study

This study serves for the objectives of investigating the relation between social media use and happiness by identifying the reasons of using social media, from this, to study how's social media affects to university students' happiness.

Literature Review

The literature review of this study is divided into three parts, including social media, the relation between social media and happiness, and level of happiness.

Social Media

Social media is a collection of online communication channels dedicated to community-based input, collaboration, interaction, and content sharing (Rouse, 2013). It is a product belongs to Web 2.0 that facilitates the interactive information sharing, users-centric design, and collaboration in World Wide Web (Sajithra K & Patil, 2013). Social media is indispensable exist to people's life, especially Facebook and YouTube have been dominated the landscape of communication tool among American young adult (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Looking for friendship or connection, fulfillment to academical purpose, entertainment, and communication are the reasons for people use social media (Aksoy, 2018).

Social Media and Happiness

Algorithm in social media is resonated to user's emotion as it feeds the information that relevant to user's emotion (H.-J. Kim, Park, & Jo, 2014). This is consistent to the research finding by Bollen, Goncalves, Ruan and Mao (2011) that emotion is correspond to social media users. In fact, an individual would engage with the person who share the similar pattern and decision-making style as them. Users will feel more happy or unhappy if their friends are in the same emotional status with them (Bollen, Gonçalves, Ruan, & Mao, 2011).

Research finding from Holmberg (2014) indicates that the frequency of using social media is correlated to emotion. In Sweden, young adults who have high frequency of social media use rate would always stay in happy condition.

Besides, a happy personality will have more friends (including online and real-life friend) compare to an ordinary person. This finding is supported by Zhan, Sun, Wang & Zhang (2016) that one of the advantages carries by social media is the engagement between users and their friends or family member through information sharing. With respect to this, the platform not only enables individual possess a conversation topic with their acquaintances, but also to strengthen the affiliation, increment of self-confidence or avoidance of tension that happen during face to face communication (Duan & Ruby Roy, 2017; Zhan, Sun, Wang, & Zhang, 2016). Teenagers obtain happiness, life satisfaction and subjective well-being via posting the items they purchase on social media (Duan & Ruby Roy, 2017). Besides, amount of Facebook's friend or follower in Instagram determine the individual's level of happiness as he or she feel belonging from the group (Doğan, 2016). In line with this, response from online mate affect to emotional behavior.

Besides, feeling of happiness arouses the willingness of an individual to disclose his or her positive emotional status on social media. However, it is interesting that social media platform is an alternative option for an individual to eliminate the loneliness or to evade from the problem that happen in real life (Holmberg, 2014; J.-H. Kim, Larose, & Peng, 2009). As a result, this incident may lead to the increment of loneliness or the reduction of happiness until the solution is found (J.-H. Kim et al., 2009).

Level of Happiness

Happiness is an emotional experience that associate with a positive feeling. Unleashing emotion brings an enjoyment to the individual compare to suppression of emotion (Tamir, Schwartz, Oishi, & Kim, 2017). There are four level of happiness, including laeuts, felix, beatitudo and sublime beatitudo. *Laeuts* forms the first level of happiness that refers to express the happiness base on something external of self. This happiness is out of self-generated and the emotion reaction is retained in short term period; The second level of happiness is *felix*. The feeling of happiness in this stage is gained by comparing the of advantage; *Beatitudo* is the third level of happiness that emphasize on seeing others positively or giving a hand to needy. *Sublime Beatitudo* is the highest level of happiness encompass fullness, goodness, beauty, truth and love (Spitzer, 1999).

Methods

Sequential explanatory of mixed method research is applied in this study to examine the relationship between social media and happiness, reasons of using social media; and identify how social media affect to users' happiness. There are 340 respondents had participated in quantitative research, whereas 10 informants are involved in qualitative research. Purposive sampling technique is implemented in this study. A questionnaire with five Likert scale is applied in this study to assess the relation between social media use and happiness, meanwhile, to identify the reasons of using social media among university. Whereas interview is applied to study on how's social media affect to university students' happiness. The content of survey is adapted from various research (Akbuga, 2014; Chou & Edge, December 2011; Gonzalez, Jomhari, & Kurniawan, 2012; Haris et al., 2014) by going through Cronbach Alpha reliability with the value of 0.843 and face validity. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient and in-depth interview are applied for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

There were 340 university students aged between 18 to 25 years old involve in this study, and 10 persons are participated in-depth interviews. Female constitutes the major respondents. Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube are the social media that frequent use by the students. This is consistent to the result by Statcounter (2019) the top three social media platform use by Malaysian are Facebook (77.88%), Instagram (4.05%) user and YouTube (3.98%) in September 2019 (Statcounter, 2019).

Results and discussion of this study is structuralized base on the research objectives. For quantitative research, the data analysis is derived from questionnaire and it is reported according the investigation relation between social media use and happiness, and identify the hidden reasons of using social media among university students.

Data Analysis of Quantitative Research: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

The data analysis is based on two sections:
First section: Relation between social media use and happiness

		Social media use relates to meaning of life	In general, social media use is happy
Social media use relates to meaning of life	Pearson Correlation	1	.555**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	340	340

Table 1: Social media use (relates to meaning of life) and happiness

Table 1 indicates that the p-value is 0.00, Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.555 in positive value. This means that ″Social media use relates to the meaning of life″ has a moderate positive effect to "In general, social media use is happy″.

		Social media use annoys me	In general, social media use is happy
Social media use annoys me	Pearson Correlation	1	- .118*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.030
	N	340	340

Table 2: Social media use annoys me and happiness

Table 2 indicates that the p-value is 0.00, Pearson's correlation coefficient is -0.118 in negative value. This means that "Social media use annoys me″ has a weak negative effect to "In general, social media use is happy″.

Research finding on relation between social media use and happiness shows "social media use relates to meaning of life″ has moderate positive effect to "In general, social media use is happy″; however, "Social media use annoys me″ has weak negative effect to "In general, social media use is happy″. This is noticeable that using social media is a worthwhile activity bring happiness to university students. As mention by Wolf (1997) and Ventegodt, Adersen and Merrick (2004), meaning of life refers to active participation in the worthwhile activities. An individual senses the happiness once his or her realize the meaning of life (Ventegodt, Andersen, & Merrick, 2004; Wolf, 1997). Besides, the result also compatible with the research by Zhan, et al. (2016) that social media use increases social benefits of maintaining in relationship. However, people will feel discomfort and reduce the happiness once they stop to use social media (Zeitel-Bank & Tat, 2014). So, it can be inferred that social media use affect to university student's happiness as it is a meaningful activity to them.

Second section: Reasons of social media use

Looking for Friendship /connection

		Social media makes me happy because I have something in common with my friends	In general, social media use enable me to connect with friends is fun
Social media makes me happy because I have something in common with my friends	Pearson Correlation	1	.687*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	340	340

Table 3: Social media use to friendship connecting

Table 3 indicates that the p-value is 0.00, Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.687. This means that "Social media makes me happy because I have something in common with my friends" has a strong effect to " In general, social media use enables me to connect with friends is fun".

		What my friends post on social media cannot affect my mood	Daily life activities of my online mates lifestyle are better and happier than me
What my friends post on social media cannot affect my mood	Pearson Correlation	1	.236*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	340	340

Table 4: Social media use for connecting to friend

Table 4 indicates that the p-value is 0.00, Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.236. This means that "What my friends post on social media cannot affect my mood" has a weak effect to " Daily life activities of my online mates' lifestyle are better and happier than me".

In the section of identifying reasons of social media use, the result indicates that there is significant strong effect between the purpose of social media use in looking for friendship/connection (i.e. social media makes me happy because I have something in common with my friends) to users' happiness (i.e. social media use enable me to connect with friends is fun). This result subvert the research finding of Manago and Vaughn (2015) that although using social media enable millennial generation to make new friends and eliminate loneliness, nonetheless, it would affect to communication enthusiasm in long term due to lack of common topic (Manago & Vaughn, 2015). Such incidence reveals the possibility of generation difference in social media use habit. Therefore, it can be inferred that university students keen on using social media to connect with friends because common conversation topic brings a sense of happiness to them. This statement reflects second level of happiness, i.e *felix,* that proposed by Spritzer (1999) that happiness is gained by comparing the advantage. Meaning that, university students determine their happiness to social media use based on the weightage of conversation topic.

However, both quantitative and qualitative research share similar result on purpose of social media use in looking for friendship/connection (i.e. what my friends post on social media cannot affect my mood) to users' happiness (i.e. daily life activities of my online mates' lifestyle are better and happier than me). Meaning that, university students' emotional reaction depends on the content of online post. Negative content such as bad news from close friends and family member arouse user's negative emotion; likewise, positive social media content inspires user's happiness. It is interesting that online post with the content of branded shoes, concert, leisure activities and photo editing skills from

online will create emotional reaction of envy. Lin and Utz (2015) explained that envy on social media consider as positive because its motive users to be more aggressive in achieving their goals. Obviously, content of social media is a mirror for university students' social media use behavior in evaluating their emotional reaction.

Entertainment

		Posting photos on social media can make me happy because it also a memory	Social media use for entertainment is happy
Posting photos on social media can make me happy because it also a memory	Pearson Correlation	1	.600**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	340	340

Table 5: Social media use for posting photos and entertainment

Table 5 indicates that the p-value is 0.00, Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.600. This means that "Posting photos on social media can make me happy because it also as s memory" has strong positive effect to "Social media use for entertainment is a happy".

Besides that, there is significant strong effect between using social media as entertainment purpose (i.e. posting photos on social media make me happy because it also a memory) to users' happiness (i.e. social media use for entertainment is happy). This finding is supplement by the result of qualitative research that social media have the features of sharing or posting the photos, videos and minigames online as memory which lead to user's happiness. An individual will feel his or her life is meaningful via photos or video recording. In light of this result, visualize recording on social media use brings different kind of pleasure of life and satisfaction to university students because they are being entertained through the process (Gonzalez et al., 2012; Hwang & Cho, 2018). In fact, photos are easier to evoke an individual's memory than wording on social media (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Young adult enjoys the freedom to share the content they are interested to social media platform, in further, to satisfy autonomy needs (Berezan, Krishen, Agarwal, & Kachroo, 2017). To be precise, using social media for posting photos purpose not only serves as memory but create the happiness to university students

Communication

		Instant messaging on social media keeps me up to date with my friends and family, it makes my reassuring	Using emoticons to communicate on social media is fun and make me happy
Instant messaging on social media keeps me up to date with my friends and family, it makes my reassuring	Pearson Correlation	1	.603**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	340	340

Table 6: Social media use for communicating

Table 6 indicates that the p-value is 0.00, Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.603. This means that "Instant messaging on social media keeps me up to date with my friends and family, it make my reassuring" has strong positive effect to "Using emoticons to communicate on social media is fun and make me happy".

The findings disclosed that using social media as communication purpose (i.e. instant messaging on social media keeps me up to date with my friends and family, it make my reassuring) is strongly correlate to users' happiness (i.e. using emoticons to communicate on social media is fun and make me happy), especially chatting or video call to friends or family who stay in long distance. Social media enable users to convey information quickly and feel more reassuring (Kumari, 2016). In relation to this, emoticons and abbreviations are online communication language for young adults to increase their happiness (Mustafa et al., 2015) because they have common language with friends and their relationship might get closer. Besides, application of emoticons to online communication lubricates the relationship between university students and their family or friends that will create a sense of happiness. To be precise, the happiness of university students gains from using social media as communication purpose is retained at first level of happiness, i.e *Laeuts*.

Overall, the happiness of university students in social media use symbolize as human basic needs. Healthy, safety, and time spending with family members forms the source of pleasure. Although there is a relation between social media use and happiness, however, happiness itself is a bonding between a person to another. It exists physically and mentally in human's daily life practice but should not go solely in virtual platform.

Data Analysis of Qualitative Research: In-Depth Interview

The in-depth interview was conducted to further analyze on how's social media affects to social media use among university students. The result is showed as below:

Impact of Social Media Use to Emotional Reaction

All the informants agree that online post such as animal abuse or news relates to death from close friends and family member will trigger their sadness and reduction to the desire of social media use. Besides, there are seven informants express their envy to the post involve with branded shoes, concert, leisure activities and photo editing skills from their online mates. Despite this, feeling of envy motive the informants to work hard or enhance their skill to achieve the goals. Apart from envy, the online post also brings travelling information to an informant. The findings are showed as below:

"I will envy to my online friends, especially those who able to edit the beautiful photo. I admire their editing skill… "

"I will ask the recommendation from my friends whenever I see their travelling post on social media because it might be my traveling plan in the future. Actually, the photos not only provide travel information but also a motivation to me."

"I don't' think I have the intention to use social media anymore once I see the post that arouse the feeling of sadness."

Impact of Social Media Use to Happiness

Using social media is the source of enjoyment and motivation for majority informants as it enables them to connect with friends and family members who stay far away. In this way, interviewees feel relax and temporary get rid of academical tension through chatting, sharing interesting videos or articles. This finding is supported by Bollen, Goncalves, Ruan and Mao (2011) that emotion is collarated to social media users. To be precise, social media content with positive may inspire user's happiness.

"It should be influential. Because the content of videos will determine user's feeling. No matter it is positive or negative. It makes you feel like the world and society is not as monotonous or simple as you think …"

However, there are two informants claim that social media use is irrelevant to happiness because it depends on time spending on internet. In fact, the longer time remains online, the increment of feeling of unhappiness. For some informants, social media is a communication tool enable people to connect with others, therefore, there is no relation between social media use to happiness. They believe that happiness is a sense that happen physically and mentally in real life that should not go on virtual platform.

For informants, happiness is portrayed as fulfillment to human basic needs which equivalent to food, water, shelter. Besides, healthy, safety, and time spending with family members is the source of pleasure. Obviously, the definition of happiness is tightened to family and friendship. The finding is showed as below:

"I think happiness is not about how wealthy you are; in turn, it refers to how much valuable memory, health or time that you are being together with the beloved one. Simple life with sufficient money to spend is also considered as happiness."

Conclusion

Result of this study reveals that there is a relation between social media use and university students' happiness. Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube are the three social media platforms that frequently used by university students nowadays. This finding had subverted to the research by Holmberg (2014) and J.-H. Kim et al (2009) that social media platform is an alternative option for people to eliminate the loneliness. In fact, students sense their happiness once they understand to the meaning of life. Using social media to engage with friend or family members, and maintain the relationship with the beloved ones is a worthwhile activity to current university students once they realize the value of engaging the people. Information sharing is one of the activity binds the relationship between social media users to their friend or family members (Zhan et al., 2016). However, the level of happiness among university students in using social media is retained at first and second level, i.e *Laeuts* and *felix* depend on the different purpose. In the purpose of using social media looks for friendship or connection, the happiness of university students is social media use is at second level, i.e *felix* which is gained by comparing the advantage. This is because social media allows university students to post and share photos, abbreviation, video or apply emoticons during interacting with each other's. Not only to university students, teenager also obtain their happiness by posting the items they purchase on social media (Duan & Ruby Roy, 2017). In light of this result, it's has created a common conversation topic between them and friends or family. Although different generation prompts the distinction of social media use habit and patterns. For millennial generation, using social media enables them to make new friends and eliminate their loneliness, nonetheless, it would affect to communication enthusiasm in long term due to lack of common topic (Manago & Vaughn, 2015). This can generalize that university students determine their happiness in social media use based on the weightage of conversational topic.

The happiness of university students in social media use is keeps at first level, i.e. *Laeuts,* that happiness is based on external of self under the purpose of communication. Chatting or video call to friends or family who stay in long distance, application of emoticons in communication with online mates enable students responds to information quickly and feel more reassuring (Kumari, 2016). Furthermore, to increase their happiness. Finally, their relationship will get closer.

Besides, different types of online content will affect to university students' emotional reaction. Negative content such as bad news from close friends or family member arouse user's negative emotion, and vice versa. Nonetheless, online content with branded shoes, concert, leisure activities and photo editing skills bring the feeling of envy to individual in pursuing their goals. Although result of this study shows the relation between social media use and happiness, however, majority of respondents agree that happiness should be practiced in human's daily life activities but not only in online platform.

Limitations and Future Studies

Since this study is focused on current university students, the result specifies on social media use habit and pattern of one category of people. Therefore, it is suggested to implement the research to other generation to explore a diverse finding. As social media has become a common communication tool nowadays.

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