Analyzing the Usage of Social Media: A Study on Elderly in Malaysia

Chan Eang Teng, Tang Mui Joo

Abstract—In the beginning of the prevalence of social media, it would be an obvious trend that the young adult age group has the highest population among the users on social media. However, apart from the age group of the users are becoming younger and younger, the elderly group has become a new force on social media, and this age group has increased rapidly. On top of that, the influence of social media towards the elderly is becoming more significant and it is even trending among them. This is because basic computer knowledge is not instilled into their life when they were young. This age group tends to be engrossed more than the young as this is something new for them, and they have the mindset that it is a new platform to approach things, and they tend to be more engrossed when they start getting in touch with the social media. Generally, most of the social media has been accepted and accessed by teenagers and young adult, but it is reasonable to believe that the social media is not really accepted among the elderly. Surprisingly, the elderlies are more addicted to the social media than the teenagers. Therefore, this study is to determine and understand the relationship between the elderly and social media, and how they employ social media in their lives. An online survey on 200 elderly aged 45-80 and an interview with a media expert are conducted to answer the main questions in the research paper. Uses and Gratification Approach is employed in theoretical framework. Finding revealed that majority of the respondents use social media to connect with family, friends, and for leisure purposes. The finding concluded that the elderly use social media differently according to their needs and wants which is in par with the highlight of Uses and Gratification theory. Considering the significantly large role social media plays in our culture and daily life today, the finding will shed some light on the effect of social media on the elderly or senior citizens who are usually relegated into a minority group in today's age where the internet and social media are of great importance to our society and humanity in general. This may also serve to be useful in understanding behavioral patterns and preference in terms of social media usage among the elderly.

Keywords—Elderly, Facebook, Malaysia, social media.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE prevalence of mobile devices is bringing a huge impact to the social media user group in the recent years. There is a big contrast of the usage of the social media among the elderlies and the young adults. It is undeniable that the social media brings a lot of benefits for both age groups. For instance web-based social networking can keep the elderly far from dejection and tension, as long as they are connected with the outside world through any platforms. They are even converging from the conventional media to the new media, as in they still use mobile phones to call, at the same time, they can go online and call their friends without any charges. Nowadays the technology usage is widely grown and more senior citizens are willing to learn how to use social media appropriately. For example, social network platforms with the features of sharing links, photos, videos, news and status updates with a growing network of contact seems to be able to replace email as the means to communicate with friends, families and colleagues [1]. It is obvious that efficiency and convenience of social media has gone far beyond their limit. Some way or another, truths have demonstrated that not just the clients of more youthful ages will lead or face digital harasser and manhandle of system when they are on the online networking. As some of the elderly are not media literate enough, they tend to misuse the social media by sharing unreal news which has caused the others who are media illiterate to believe what he/she has mentioned in their news feed.

Due to the advancement of technology, senior citizens are catching up by learning how to use social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp and others. As a result, they might be trapped in social network as they found many interesting activities they never faced or seen before. However, these could be some reasons leading them to have social disconnection such as loneliness. As the children of the senior citizens have grown up, they would choose to work or study far away from home. This has made them feel like disconnected from society and also lacked of social interaction, which has led them to create a false thought of not being appreciated [2]. Senior citizens then might rely on social media in order to find the feeling of being appreciated. [2] At the same time some might have found someone who is willing to talk to them through social media. This would lead to social disconnection as the senior citizens now are more willing to be engaged in social media than in real life. This research is to study the factors of the elderly adopting to social media and how they cope with this new technology. In addition, this research is also to determine the effects of the usage of social media among Malaysian elderly.

II. USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG ELDERLY

Generally, the elderly use social media to enhance social connectedness and social support. Goswami et al. [3] stated that through social media the risk of social exclusion is reduced and that's why the elderly are using this platform for social connectedness. The elderly utilize online networking to invest energy because of some medical problems, their retirement from dynamic occupation and diminished part in family. Furthermore, Nimrod [4] claims that joining an online group

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helps the elderly to reinforce their mental self-view, feeling of free and abnormal state of social availability. Apart from that, social media also provides informational support in terms of advice, suggestions and information. Goswami et al. [3] argued that the elderly use social media to maintain existing ties and create new online ties. At the same time, social media also enhances social engagement and interaction among the elderly. Social media is widely used by elderly as it is cheap and easy to use [5]. When the elderly are not capable of doing complicated tasks, they seek for social media to get information as it is convenient [3].

From the past research, the elderly seem to be more interested on exchanging ideas and information to other online communities that have the same interest [6]. Besides that, they will be more interested on issues related to challenges associated with later life such as "retirement," "aging," and "health" ,"family" and "finances" [4] At the same time, the elderly also use the social media as a tool for entertainment and companionship. As a result, they enjoyed not only the companionship and the joyfulness but it has also created an opportunity for self-expression. Rahim and Roslan [7] said that with the help of ICT, elderly can communicate to the world. Rahim and Roslan [7] uncovered some motivation behind why some elderly going up against with web and interpersonal organization. These reasons reflect the factor causing the elderly refuse to use social network. Indirectly, it also displays the defect and negative impact of social network to the elderly. For example, conditions of literacy and the computer knowledge are not conducive to elderly when they learn to use social networks. Milligan & Passey [8] evidenced that the elderly online users are increasing. The main reason of elderly using computer includes social activity and cultural integration. Both of them can be achieved when they use social media.

According to Millingan & Passey [8], some abroad research clearly stated that the main reason of elderly using social media is keeping in touch with the community. Plus, it also listed the common barriers to stop elderly from accessing internet. These barriers indirectly reduce the influence of social media among the elderly. Norizan et al. [9] found out that the factor of the majority respondents in the range of 40 to 49 years old switch to smart phone technology on self-demand such as work purpose meanwhile the majority respondents of 50 years old and above switch to smart phone with the encouragement of their family members. This research also found out that one's employment status and monthly income are indirectly influencing the presentation to utilization of web innovation to influence the quantity of advanced cell client. The result showed that the number of the respondents in the range of 40 to 59 years old switch to a smart phone for internet access and social media interaction is higher compared to the respondents from the age range of 60 and above. This is because most of the respondents from the age group of 60 and above. According to a survey done by Koppen [10], it is demonstrated that however a big share of 57% of elderly are using desktop PC, there is as yet an immense number of elderly who declines to get to the web and social media sites. Neuberger [11] discovered that the new pattern of the web-based social networking shall be the elder

adult use the web-based social networking more than the adolescents. Surprisingly, the elderlies who are utilizing the web or the online networking are the ones who follow back their base of their family through the web. Although they are at their third or fourth age, they are still learning informally. Although it is not an easy task, it is clear that the number of the old people who wants to learn has been increasing. The use of web-based social networking among the elderly is turning into a pattern, where the elderly has been utilizing the web to interface themselves and they are in the long run having a position in the Internet world. Baker et al. [12] opined that the central to social network analysis research with minority elders is the goal of understanding how cultural norms and values, as well as structural barriers within a society, help shape the ties that exist within this population. Among all of the factors, the elders would learn a new culture out of their native culture, or even the new culture on the Internet, which is to share their daily life on the social media.

Potter [13] mentioned that the entertainment among the elders has evolved from the conventional entertainment towards the new entertainment, and the elders even watch their television on the internet as well. It is obvious to see that the trend has evolved from the traditional to the present, and at the same time, the elders are learning and using their mind very often. This will decrease the risk of them getting chronic diseases. In other words, the term 'entertainment' for the elders has evolved from the old media to the new media. The transmission of the eras would be obvious in a way that the elders would make the internet as their second television platform, and internet for them would be a new learning platform as well. Ractham and Techatassanasoontorn [14] found out that the elderly mainly use social media for their family, health, and leisure. Plus, young-feeling elderly like to set up new connections via web-based networking media, however conversely, the elderly do not like to enlarge their group of friends by utilizing online networking because of the absence of trust in web-based social networking. Iqbal et al. [15] also mentioned that from April 2009 to May 2011, they observed 150% increase in the use of social media sites. Elderly are using social networking sites for their entertainment, making new friends, sharing information, knowledge, and photographs, and to connect with each other. It has clearly shown that the increase of elderly using social media is notable; they use it for their own purposes.

Curran et al. [16] described that online networking is used more on communication than obtaining information. Clearly, communication is never just about the act of communicating and communicational desires and informational requirements often overlap. There is no doubt that the digital act of self-communication has become part of many people's everyday rituals. Social media is a form of communication. Finn [17] found out few interesting points through her research regarding social media and the elderly. One of them is by using social network, the senior citizens could easily achieve social connectivity with others no matter where they are or where are they from. Ongeri [18] said that social networks are an important communication tool, and organizations working with

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older people find that social media is an effective way of engaging and interacting. To conclude, people tend to use social media as communication platform that could overcome loneliness.

III. Effect of Social Media

Sparks [19] showed in their research that those who use net for less social purposes will suffer less negative social effects comparatively. Wu and Zhang [20] said that that the social disconnection had somehow brought negative impact in the family. Arguments are made to determine what social media has done to the elderly.

People suffer from loneliness when some important parts in their life are missing. Replacement could be done, and it is possible that the replacement can be alcohol, drugs, pets and even social media [20]. Vickers [21] assessed that the increased uncertainty in lifetime worsens by the possibility that the elderly are incompetent compared to youth as shaped by media portrayals. Dumbrell and Steele [22] argued that emergence of social media has provided more beneficial health related information to the elderly. In addition, McGrath [23] found that new media technologies within the home are leading to increased social isolation and a privatization of people's lives within the household.

Wilson & Moulton [24] did a study to provide better understanding about the correlation between the loneliness among elderly aged 45 and the causes in different aspects. One of the aspects is the involvement in social network and the level of engagement among the older adults.. In another words, the lonely respondents feel that the Internet makes it easier to share personal information than non-lonely respondents. The lonely respondents are more likely to agree with the statement of "Technology has made it harder to spend time with my friends and family in person". The statement had 12% of lonely respondent agreed and 5% of non-lonely respondents agreed. Loneliness is a considerable point of the elderly using social media, thus we are going to carry out a research on the reasons why the elderly are using social media. In retort, in a study regarding 'Thai elderly behavior of internet use' by Loipha [25], a majority of Thai elderly is against using the Internet as their main source of information and social relationship mainly due to poor physical conditions such as poor eyesight and cataract. As such, for the sake of the wellbeing of their health, the Thai elderly chose not to use social media and this predicament could be used to reflect the situation of the elderly here in Malaysia or globally as poor physical conditions and deteriorating bodily functions such as poor eyesight.

Jan van Dijk [26] said that the new infrastructure of the society would be the social media, with a little of exaggeration, we may also call the 21st century the age of networks. The quantity and quality of the social relationships among the elderly has already improved as in they improved themselves and they actually learn how to communicate in a new way, connecting to their friends in a new way, and even finding back their old friends in a new way. Through these quality social relationships, they eventually had found a new way to talk to people. According to Boll & Brune [27], one of the most important factors that deter the elderly from using social media or the internet in general is due to privacy concerns and issues regarding the security of data and personal information. The same study also found out that the elderly are adamant in avoiding social media due to most, if not all-social media sites requiring the users to reveal their personal information. This resulted in fear among the elderly where a majority of them are not technologically literate enough to protect this personal, sensitive information from becoming public. However, in this same study, Boll & Brune [27] offered a solution by presenting their own UI (User Interface) design, which involves a simplified and basic menu structure to help the elderly users orientate in the UI easily when navigating the complicated web pages from social media sites.

The elderly are classified into three categories which are information swappers, aging oriented and socializers [4]. In social media, trust of technology is one of the factors that have been shown to influence how likely users are to adopt a new technology. Ridings et al. [28] argued that trust is central to technology acceptance when the technology itself involves social uncertainty and risk. When people are having higher confidence, they will share more personal information on the social media. For older adults, trust in SNS played a significant role in intention to use these websites [29].

IV. Theoretical Framework

Uses and gratifications theory generally outlines the utilization of media to fulfill their own needs and wants. This theory is more emphasizing on what people do with media rather than what media do to people. People use media accordingly to fulfil or satisfy their specific or personal needs. As mentioned in the literature review, the elderly use social media to connect with family, for leisure purpose and overcome loneliness. The elderly tend to search and explore more information or news on social media to enhance themselves and stick to the current trend. They could get the first hand information on social media which has been published by the newspaper publisher on social media. Instead of getting news from the old media which is the physical newspaper, they opt to learn to use Internet to fulfil their desire to be more informative. It is also known as the cognitive needs in uses and gratification theory. Besides, social media is used by the elderly to keep in touch with their friends or relatives who are far away from them. And, when people are getting older, their ability to walk or go out is getting lesser, thus by using social media, they are able to maintain connecting with friends and relatives. They can even get connected with their old friends or trace back their original roots by using social media or the Internet. Loneliness can be curbed by using social media as well. Elderly use social media for their entertainment purpose. Elderly use social media for their entertainment purposes by watching videos, photos or articles.

V. Methodology

This research collects data by using mixed methods research by conducting survey and interview. Survey questionnaire is

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done on a sample of 200 respondents aged 45-80 in Klang Valley, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This sample group is selected due to the reason that social media among them is considered fresh compared to generation Y. Besides that, an interview with a media expert is conducted too.
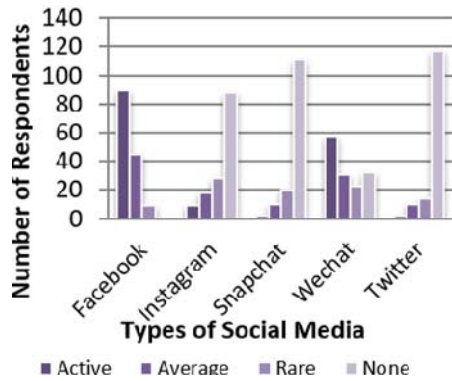
VI. RESULT

A. User Behavior of Social Media

Fig. 1 Usage of Social Media among the age group of 40-59 years old

Fig. 1 has shown the usage of social media among the aged group of 40-59. It is obvious that Facebook has the highest population compared to Snapchat and Twitter. For these age groups, Facebook is popular among them as the interface is actually user friendly, and it enables them to connect with their friends anytime and anywhere. Besides, Facebook enables them to share information related to their interest, such as medical information, recipes, videos, and even their current mood that they wish to share within their own social circle.

The second highest would be Wechat, as the features are also user friendly. Its function is almost similar as Facebook, as it enables the users to chat and to share their statuses to only their friend circle.

From the usage of social media, we found out that the user behaviour of the social media varies according to their own needs and wants.
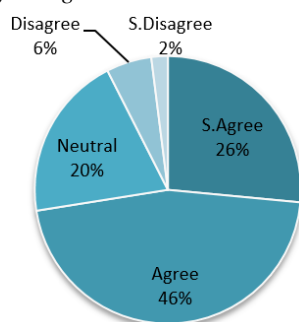
B. Purposes of Using Social Media

Fig. 2 Usage of social media to connect with family

Fig. 2 has shown the usage of social media to get connected with families. The highest percentage of 46% agrees that they use social media to connect with family. It is undeniable that

social media connects people everywhere, especially connecting the far and extended relatives.
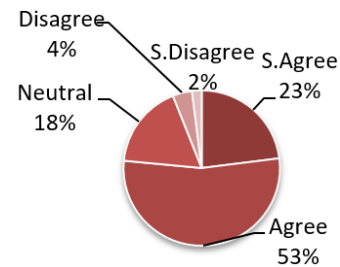

Fig. 3 Social Media to connect with friends

Fig. 3 has shown the usage of the social media to get connected with their friends. From the 200 respondents, majority of the respondents agreed with the statement of getting connected to friends.

Fig. 4 showed that the highest percentage of the agreement levels is neutral with 33%. It means that meeting new friends is not their main purpose of using social media, but somehow some of them have utilized this function in their daily life too. The second agreement levels in this chart are "Agree". There are 26% respondents agree that meeting more people is one of the features when they are using social media. We can analyze that social media have brought some impact of social intercourse to this group. They may use social network sites to maintain or even extend their interpersonal relationship via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and so on.
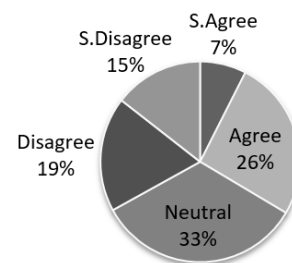
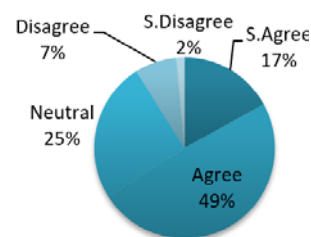

Fig. 4 Social Media to meet new people

Fig. 5 Social media for leisure purposes

Fig. 5 indicated that 49% of the respondents use the social media to reach their leisure purpose which stands the highest number among other purposes. It means that the recreational features of the social media are very important to attract these elder users to be engaged in the social media. Besides, there are 25% of respondents remained neutral with their answers. For the neutral answers, we realize that they are also the potential

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users who are using the leisure features of the social media but the leisure purpose is not the main usage in all of their use.

To conclude, there are only 10% of the respondent gave the negative answer about their leisure purpose on social media. Majority of the respondent use social media for their leisure purposes, and it is the main reason why elder adult are using social media.
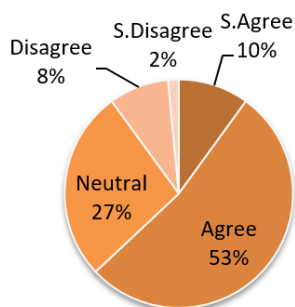
Fig. 6 Using Social Media to Learn New Things

Fig. 6 shows that 53%of the respondents indicated that they use social media to learn new things. This result is parallel to what have been reviewed as most elderly viewed social media platform as a tool to learn something new in terms of information and knowledge. Moreover, since most of the respondents were introduced to social media through family and friends, they are able to learn and utilize their respective social media platform through the help of their family and friends in seeking for new information. Only a small minority of respondent at 2% indicated that they do not use social media as a means of learning new things. This is probably due to some of the elderly who do not fully understand on how to use or utilize social media for that purpose. This again explains the notion that people will choose to utilize the usage of social media to maximize their satisfaction or gratification as highlighted in Uses and Gratification theory.

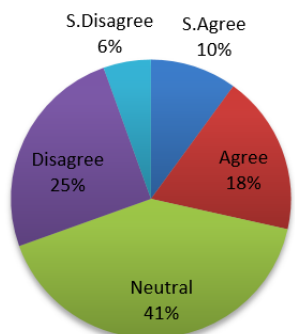*C. Effect of Social Media*

Fig. 7 Social Media Benefits Health

From Fig. 7, we discover that 41% of our respondents remained neutral on this statement. 18% of the respondents agree with the statement that "social media benefits my health". The respondents who disagree occupied 25%. To conclude, majority of our respondents opined that social media has played limited role in benefiting their knowledge in health issue.

According to our interviewee, the elder adults in present are engrossed on the social media to the extent they have literally forgotten about everything around them in their real life. She also stated that the notifications of social media apps disturb the daily life of the elderly when they were attracted and alarmed by the notifications while sleeping. This will affect their sleeping quality, and hence explain why the percentage of disagreement is higher than agreement. To conclude, the usage of social media is not sharing positive relationship with their health issue directly.
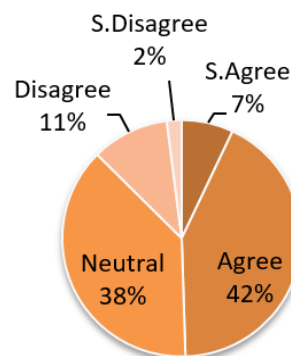

Fig. 8 Social Media Benefits Social Learning Skills

Fig. 8 shows to what extent the social media has benefited social learning skills of elderly. From 200 elder respondents, the number of respondents who agree this statement is the highest, 42%. This has indicated that these elder social media users have positive attitudes on their social learning skills through social media. However, there are 38% who remained neutral with the statement that "social media benefits my social learning skills". To conclude, most of the respondents opined that social media benefit their social learning skills.
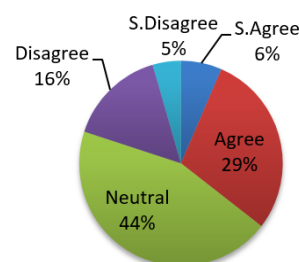

Fig. 9 News trustworthiness on Social Media

Fig. 9 shows that majority of the respondent stayed neutral whether they trust news on social media. This finding, in relation to our research objectives, shows that respondents are skeptical when it comes to trusting the news on social media. This is probably because of the news obtained from social media are from unknown or untrustworthy sources such as citizen journalist or bloggers which have affected the trustworthiness when it comes to consuming news from social media. Another possible factor is that the elderly use multiple platforms to obtain news such as television and newspaper instead of solely social media.

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Fig. 9 also shows that only 5% of the respondents do not trust news on social. Media those who do not trust the news on social media completely and probably still use old media such as newspaper, television and radio to obtain their news. It also indicates that the elderly use social media widely which might reduce the generation gap in the society This is related to the Uses and Gratification theory that more and more elderly are using social media as a mean to look for more news and information to gain more knowledge.
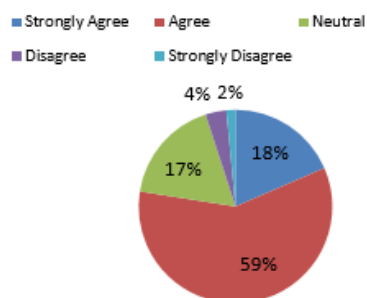

Fig. 10 Social Media Makes Communication Easier

Fig. 10 shows that 77% of the respondents agree that the communication has become easier due to social media. And, only 6% disagree with the fact that social media have made their communication easier. The distinctive and clear gap between the agreement and disagreement has indicated the norms that social media have eased their communication in their daily life.
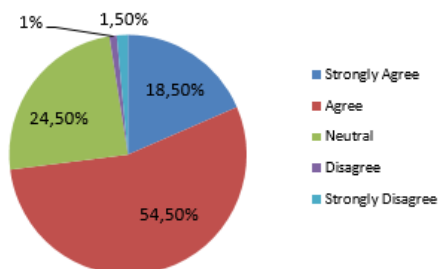

Fig. 11 Social Media Makes Me Understand the Younger Generation Better

In Fig. 11, 73% of the respondents opined that social media has helped them to understand the younger generation better. Only about 3% of them believed that social media does not help them to understand the younger generation better. 49 (24.5%) respondents remained neutral in this statement.

To conclude, the social media indeed help them to understand the younger generation better and to decrease the gap between the elderly and the younger generation. Hence, the social media has gratified their needs to stay more relevance and closer to the younger generation. This would definitely help to reduce the communication gap caused by generation gap as of the general worry and concern now.

VII. OUTCOME OF ANALYSIS

The finding discovered that Facebook is the most popular social media platform among the elderly regardless of the age groups probably due to the popularity and the cultural acceptance of the social media platform compared to other platforms [10]. Thus, in relation with our other findings regarding the majority of our respondents using social media as a way of connecting with friends and family, and with the supporting views of our interviewee about how engrossed elderly today in using social media in their everyday life, we can conclude that "Facebook", followed by "Wechat" remained a popular social media platform among the elderly and elder adults.

It is also shown in the findings that the family stands as the main force for the elderly to join in the social media, followed by other factors such as friends, self-efforts, business and media. 55% of them joined social media few years ago with the influence and encouragement of family. Only 23% of them just newly joined in. This has indicated that social media is no longer new to the elderly. Majority of the elderly use smartphone to access to social media, and followed by tablet, desktop and laptop. This has highlighted the popularity of the usage of smartphone among the elderly in Malaysia too.

63% of the elderly has the habit of accessing social media daily which has revealed that fact that social media has been a part of their life to gratify their own needs. The main purpose of the elderly to use social media is to connect with their family, followed by connecting with their friends. Here, it has indicated the use of social media among the elderly in Malaysia is more communication led than information driven.

Social media is also beneficial to the health of the elderly in terms of gaining support and new information about their health issues. The elderly is claimed to be too engrossed on the social media to the extent they have literally forgotten about everything around them in their life.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The engagement of the elder adults towards the social media has been an issue that shall be taken care of. The advancement of the social media has been a great deal for users in terms of the convenience of information gaining. Information sharing has changed its way to reach the targeted audiences, as in information sharing has converged to mobile ways, to let the targeted audiences to get firsthand information at anytime and anywhere. It is undeniable that technology helps in all aspects, and the improvement of the facilities from 10 years back and forth has been enhancing the ways that people get messages. In a long-term period, it is a positive thing that we should be looking on and of course, the drawbacks are always there. When a person is engaged on the social media, they are actually connecting with their old friends, and bridging back the memories that they shared with each other. On the other hand, when a person is too engrossed onto the social media, they tend to forget face-to-face communication, and their social skills are going to be deteriorated. At the same time, the impact of social media towards the elderly has become more trending and

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impactful. This is because basic computer knowledge is not instilled into their life when they were young. Therefore this age group tends to be more engrossed onto social media than the young. Social media have re-connected, re-enhanced and reinforced the sociability of the elderly in the fast pace of technology.

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