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Uncertainty Reduction Strategy and Networking Sites Choice among International Students in Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Web 2.0 in the 21st century was accompanied by various social networking sites (SNSs). Although the democratic nature of the Internet offered freedom to choose an SNS, selecting the appropriate one for communication became difficult. The research examines the most used uncertainty reduction strategy international students employ for communication within and outside their school environment. It investigates the most dominant social networking platforms used by international students in their home country, within North Cyprus and among other international students within the school environment. The study population was 16,000 students, with 450 respondents as sample size. The analysis was done using SPSS for demographics and JASP 0.10.20, with a binomial frequency that captures the results depicting that international student most prefer WhatsApp for communicating with families in their home country, school environment North Cyprus and others. The results also revealed that users looked out for convenience and security as the best reasons for reducing their level of uncertainty in communication. The study recommends that further research should be concentrated on longitudinal studies and also consider doing research using any of the approaches that are qualitatively inclined to ascertain if the result will be in tandem with the Eastern Mediterranean University when communicating with other international students.

KEYWORDS: Uncertainty Reduction Strategy, Choice, Networking Sites, International Students.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of social networking sites (SNSs) is regarded as the most popular means for communication nowadays, as communication changes and advances with technology, during interpersonal and even mass communication; the use of SNSs appears to be the most effective and most used in the 21st century for communication (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). According to Sharma & Godiyal (2016), SNSs aided communication in diverse ways and also is considered as a result of the content the users share too; this makes its (SNSs) usage essential (Wilson et al. 2002). Sharma & Godiyal focussed on social media usage by students from the college to ascertain their level of usage by gender.

Different platforms for communication abound in our present world today, allowing users to select from the available platforms at their disposal; thus, users are presented with choices (Ezumah, 2013; Ting, Wong, de Run, & Lau, 2015). Social networking sites (SNS) are described as technological applications that permit people with the same interest (Ellison, 2007). Supporting this view, Chae (2018) observed different SNSs with different functionality and applicability. Prominent among these SNSs are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, which have been predominantly used among the youths for communication purposes such as chatting, blogging, and forming communities (Faruq, Rahman, & Alam, 2017). Of all the available SNS, Facebook is the most commonly utilised (Pornsakulvanich, 2017). Evidence has shown that SNS has been a suitable means of interaction among people since the advancement of technology. This view is in line with research assertion, which suggests that SNSs are used for sharing information and knowledge creation and as an avenue for collaboration (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017). It is not restricted to opinion leaders only, but a type of communication that cuts across all. Therefore, different users seem to behave uncertainly based on the axiom of uncertainty reduction.

As a result, some authors observed that although the SNSs connects people based on the features of the technologies they utilised, this assisted in maintaining those relationships that earlier existed. It made it possible for new friends to connect based on interests such as politics and other activities. Thus the audience select which platform to use for their communication which others are based on religion, same nationality, sexual grounds, same race and same language (Liu & Ying, 2010). Review on SNSs presented that users do not only interact with others they are friends but also try

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to relate with others who are not friends too on SNSs, based on their interest level due to users profiles. Thus the use of SNSs gives three functions which encompass the presentation of oneself, sharing of information and networking socially (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Amidst the three (3) levels involved in communication as sharing of information and its networking are termed as the most essential thus, communication online is shrouded in uncertainty which makes an author to opined that human existence is amidst uncertainty as long as the earth is a concern, "it is in the midst of uncertainty" (Montuori, 2014). Adding that nothing is steady or regular since we have moved from Jobs, relationships, Identities, demographics, gender roles, global power dynamics all seem to be changing rapidly. Mainly fueled, but not exclusively, as a result of technological innovations, Zia Sardar Zygmunt Bauman opined that we are in a "runaway world" according to (Bauman 2005; Sardar, 2010).

Thus what was obtainable in those days now tend to be changing since nothing is steady, but instead, some changes can be termed as "solid modernity" changed to "liquid modernity", described as a world of constant change and disequilibrium. Thus, this is the case of our present technological advancements that continue to witness changes and are termed a transitional moment, thus "uncertainty" resulting from specific changes to uncertainty observed by (Montuori 2014). Thus this propels users to employ different strategies during interaction in communication which ranges from the use of profile and, in some instances, the use of information which serves as means of identity for disclosure which screen names are also considered as a critical factor for uncertainty reduction (Joinson, 2003).

Many happenings that seem uncertain have made some of the writers consider pending cases that turn out to be cases of interest for consideration for researching. Thus the cases of uncertainty reduction in communication with SNSs aided communication by individuals to have lots of alternatives for their communication. For example, when a student prefers WhatsApp to the most popular Facebook, these are the most popular sites in North Cyprus. However, still, a student prefers a particular network to the other such as some platforms are meant for interaction by the specific group for interactions, some are meant for academic purposes, businesses and games.

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Social Networking sites have different roles ranging from one profession to another and for one reason to the other, thus what the students employ it for and their reasons for choosing a platform thus the essence of this paper. Thus the following research questions and their objectives are posed based on the following observation by the researchers: Although different research on URS have been carried out giving different results on which URS is used mainly by people in those locations and when in social interactions.

OBJECTIVES& RESEARCH QUESTION

1. to investigate which (URS) uncertainty reduction strategies are primarily used on social networking sites by EMU International students since there are many strategies that one can apply.

2. to know the most uncertain stage of the URS by International students during social interaction, there are three stages noticed during interaction: the Entry stage, Personal stage, and Exit stage.

3. to establish facts on the most used SNSs by students when they communicate home, use in their host community and interaction with others.

4. to know the students reasons for selecting and reducing their uncertainty with particular social networking sites.

Hence the study is guided by these research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do EMU students on SNSs use passive, active and interactive uncertainty reduction strategies?

RQ2: Which of the stages is the most uncertain stage by International students in social interaction in EMU?

RQ3: Which platform do EMU students use mostly when communicating with home, their host communities and other international students outside the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus?

RQ4: What are the reasons for reducing uncertainty when the students prefer to use a particular social networking site during communication?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The uncertainty reduction theory, was first coined by (Berger and Caabrese, 1975). According to the uncertainty reduction theory (URT), the theory asserts that information seeking has three types of URS uncertainty reduction strategies: (passive, active and interactive), which is employed to reduce uncertainty in communication. Uncertainty reduction theory assists information seekers to be able to predict the attitudes of the fellows they are interacting with this. Thus, the information seekers tend to know the fellow they communicate with, which assist them in creating a "mental model" that will help them in predicting the behaviour of the interactants based on the impression they may create their intentions, emotions and likely behaviour they may exhibit (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010).

In recent years, social support researchers in communication and many other disciplines have become interested in the capabilities of computer-mediated communication channels for supplementing (and sometimes replacing) traditional face-to-face social support networks (Turner, Grube, & Meyers, 2001; Wright & Miller, 2010). Authors are now focussing their attention on SNSs, such as an extension of one's social support network in aiding activities they carry out (Bryant, Marmo, & Ramirez, 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; High & Solomon, 2011). The concept of support network preference within computer-mediated contexts appears to be an essential variable in the process of social support mobilisation, thus its essence in social mobilisation and support (Wright & Miller, 2010; Wright, Rains, & Banas, 2010).

There is considerable manifest that people differ in their preference for strong-tie versus weak-tie social support in face-to-face and computer-mediated contexts (Adelman, Parks, & Albrecht, 1987; Walther & Boyd, 2002; Wright & Bell, 2003). It is dependent on the type of support they sought for considering the characteristics of the tie, either strong or weak on social networks, to be specific Facebook and Twitter with the cases of "real times" hinging on "times and spaces". For example, Facebook permits immediate happening, while Twitter permits spreading what they do (Liu & Xing 2010). Conversely, Ozer (2014) study concludes that SNSs create addiction among youths. This implies that it might cause some psychological problems due to overutilisation and dedication to its use, especially when it has to do with voyeurism and social interaction, which covers the aspect of social surveillance (Mäntymäki & Islam, 2016).

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Supporting this notion, a growing body of literature has likewise revealed that cyberbullying, exposing people to illegal content and the invasion of people's privacy that has to do with their health, personal and private life are the opposing sides of the usage of SNSs (Kumari & Verma, 2015; Roessler & Mokrosinska, 2013). Notwithstanding, the youth widely uses it because it is less cost-effective, and users can afford it for practical communication purposes (Pornsakulvanich, 2017). This can best be described with the axioms postulated and used as truth that existed for uncertainty to be reduced.

STUDENTS AND CHOICE OF NETWORKING SITES

Students use social networking sites, but the engagement rate varies from one platform to the other, adding that they can spend up to 4-6 hours a day. Undergraduate students are more avid social media users than postgraduates, although they use Facebook as a platform. Graduate students use Twitter and networks like Google$^+$ and LinkedIn, although other platforms are used by students in school for academic purposes, as observed by (McGough & Salomon, 2013). Thus, the choice of networking sites is possible with the availability of different social media platforms used for communication and other interactions among students. The platforms vary from their functionality to their usability. Additionally, the place of each platform has a specific interface for easy identification. Thus, the interface also added to the use of the sites, enabling the user to decide to use a particular platform or combine both for better and more precise message delivery. In some instances, the uses of more than three platforms are employed.

International Students: This is seen as students studying outside their country, which are in North Cyprus. EMU counts students from different nationalities: Egypt, Libya, Syria, Jordan, Nigeria, Cameroon, Swazi, Kenya, The Gambia, Iraq, Yemen, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Iran, Lesotho and Ghana, to mention but a few. This study concentrated on those (international students) that are studying in (EMU) North Cyprus during the 2019 spring session. Based on this background, the researcher assumed that communication online among students might be difficult due to their different cultures, gender, and even the academic background that presents itself to the multicultural students from different nationalities to study in North Cyprus.

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METHOD

A quantitative research study was designed for international students in Eastern Mediterranean University North Cyprus during the 2019 academic session. Out of 16,000 international students that enrolled, some dominant nationalities were chosen for the research based on the highest number of students from those countries. These are Cypriots, Turks, Iranian, Palestinian/Jordanian, Nigerians and Zimbabweans, constituting six countries. The researcher used simple random sampling to select about 450 students, which were 450 (n= 241 males and 209 females).

FINDINGS

Based on age brackets, age 16-23 are 43.6%, while age 24-31 are 40.4%. Moreover, the percentages of the nationalities are presented as it is inevitable to avoid other nationalities since it is randomly done. Other nationalities include Turkish are 4.9%, Cypriots which are 8.9%, Nigerians are 46.2%, Zimbabweans are 9.6%. While Palestinian/ Jordanians constitute about 3.1%, with Iranians having 9.1% and other nationalities constituting about 18.2%. *See table 1*

Demographics of the respondents by: gender, age, and nationality

Table 1

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage
Gender		
Male	241	53.6%
Female	209	46.4%
Total	450	100%
Age		
16-23	196	43.6%
24-31	182	40.4%
32-39	45	10.0%
40-47	17	3.8%
48 and above	10	2.2%
Total	450	100.0
Nationalities		
Turkish	22	4.9%
Cypriots	40	8.9%
Nigerians	208	46.2%
Zimbabweans	43	9.6%
Palestinian/Jordanians	14	3.1%
Iranian	41	9.1%
Others	82	18.2%
Total	450	100.0%

Other questions that are posed by the researchers seeking for clarity is the issue of SNSs usage and platforms, which is the most prefered by students; thus, the student's responses are based on the responses on the questionnaire thus for proper presentation and accordance by numbering, the result is as follows:

Binomial Test

Variable	Level	Counts	Total	Proportion	p
Q13	Facebook	105	450	0.233	< .001
	WhatsApp	136	450	0.302	< .001
	Instagram	116	450	0.258	< .001
	Twitter	36	450	0.080	< .001
	Snapchat	42	450	0.093	< .001
	Others	15	450	0.033	< .001
Q14	Facebook	74	450	0.164	< .001
	WhatsApp	145	450	0.322	< .001
	Instagram	140	450	0.311	< .001
	Twitter	35	450	0.078	< .001
	Snapchat	45	450	0.100	< .001
	Others	11	450	0.024	< .001
Q15	Facebook	94	450	0.209	< .001
	WhatsApp	136	450	0.302	< .001
	Instagram	111	450	0.247	< .001
	Twitter	34	450	0.076	< .001
	Snapchat	55	450	0.122	< .001
	Others	20	450	0.044	< .001
Q16	For convenience	168	450	0.373	< .001
	For security	138	450	0.307	< .001
	For the sake of keeping secret	75	450	0.167	< .001
	For the sake of availability	51	450	0.113	< .001
	Others ....please specify	18	450	0.040	< .001
Q19	1st entry stage	223	450	0.496	0.888
	Personal stage	205	450	0.456	0.066
	Exit stage	22	450	0.049	< .001
Q23	Passive by observation	130	450	0.289	< .001
	By being active	224	450	0.498	0.962
	By being interactive, contacting the targeted persons	96	450	0.213	< .001

Note. Proportions tested against a value: 0.5.

Based on questions posed by the researchers, question one inquires the extent to which EMU students on SNSs use passive, active and interactive uncertainty reduction strategies.

Question 2 gives answers to the strategy most used by International students in EMU; thus, interactive seems to be the most prefered as the respondent's results revealed that by observation, is having 130 counts with the proportion 0.289, which is represented as 28.9% and the active which is the highest is 224 counts with 49.8%. Interactive has a 0.213 proportion which is equivalent to 21.3%. During the interaction, the entry-stage seems to be the most uncertain stage with 223 counts, and this stood at 49.6%, while the personal stage is 205 counts giving 45.6%, while the exit stage is just 22 counts with about 4.9%, based on the above result, the entry stage is the most uncertain stage by international students.

Answering questions (3) three which constitute platforms used prefered in communicating with home, host communities and other international students, results revealed that WhatsApp. However, an instant messaging App is most prefered by the students for communicating with home, used in communication in their host community and with others though at a different rate. Use of WhatsApp to communicate home, 136 counts and it is equivalent to 30.2%, WhatsApp also used for communication among international students in North Cyprus is 145 counts with a proportion of 0.322 equivalent to 32.2% and used by international students for communicating with others, WhatsApp is 136 counts 0.302 by proportion equivalent to 30.2% with other SNSs such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and other platforms use for communication.

Reasons giving for preference of a platform varies for one purpose to the other thus these are the reasons based on proportion, for convenience sake, this is generalised which is the highest response, is 168 count with 0.373 proportion tantamount to 37.3%, for security reasons, 138 count proportion at 0.307 which is 30.7% and for the sake of secrecy, 75 counts and 0.167 proportion at 16.7% and the usage-based on availability.

DISCUSSIONS

With the above results, in a country like the Netherlands, when the three strategies were employed, passive, active and interactive, the 'passive' was most used unlike with the interactive as the second

most used strategy then the 'active' based on research conducted by (Authenis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010). Thus with the case of SNSs used for communications, active is the most utilised but now regarded as "extra- active"; hence users tend to gather more information from online comments written by others. It is emphasised as a means of getting rid of unwanted implications by others during communication; they employ the URS. (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010).

In the case of fan visiting, the interactive strategy seems to have more influence than the passive and active strategy based on research conducted when examining the role played by fans in continuous visiting behaviour on being loyal. For their satisfaction hence it is a bit different for each country, and each organisation. in the Netherland, passive mainly was used, and interactive seems to be more dominant in use by fans, while in North Cyprus among students, the active strategy is mainly employed (Shin, Lee, & Yang, 2017).

This is also supported by research on relational uncertainty reduction stages where the passive strategy is mainly used for screening during a relationship to be specific at the entry stage of the relationship as submitted by (Fox & Anderregg, 2014). Thus the stages vary from one relationship to the other. Hence in cases of social attraction and perceived relational norms, which all are relational, the passive is the most applied type of strategy. Although both are romantic, the relationship among students can be romantic, and at times, it can be casual too. On the stages that users are more uncertain of themselves is agree to be the first stage which the users have not known each other this is said to be a stage which under normal circumstances, the level of uncertainty seems to be high; thus, everybody seems to be sceptical about the other person especially when meeting for the first time.

Although the personal stage seems to be the second stage that a person may be careful too when some information is disclosed, they are also used to guide against the following line of action. Thus, some other people also find it challenging to open up. Thus, it is the personal stage. This can best be tied to axiom one, which is factual and axiom three about information disclosure as they presented (Berger & Calabress, 1975). The place of network preference with communication with home, North Cyprus, and other people seems not to agree that Facebook is regarded as the most dominant which users employ for their communication reasons because there are many

applications that users can use as an alternative for their communication. Hence, EMU students prefer the use of WhatsApp for their communication. This is in agreement with the research conducted on "usability and functionality of sites" with regards to about 14 different networks and others which shows that Facebook is gradually being overtaken by other platforms used for communication WhatsApp leads with about 91.8% while Facebook is next with 91.3% (Korhan & Ersoy, 2015).

Harrison et al. (2013) observe that the advent of mobile devices is presented with some challenges to be specific in the aspect of usage; hence users can not model the traditional way of using the applications. Some preferred platforms are Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Skype, Pinterest, Viber, Tango, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Among the students, there is some unique application that the student's Iranian students disclosed use Telegram, Russians use VK, and Wechat by Chinese students. Therefore, preference is based on what is used mainly by the students from their home country, which are unique cases of EMU students experiences and disclosure.

On what motivates usage, the reasons vary from one user to the other, although generalised. It was discovered that in similar work, it was specified. Hence convenience is the utmost reason for choosing a platform to use for communication. Facebook seems to be primarily used based on the time they spend, Twitter next, Instagram and Snapchat, but the motivating factor varies for each platform; thus, comparing the four (4) entertainment seems to be one of the top motivating factors for Facebook and Twitter. In contrast, Facebook is good for self-documentation (Alhabash & Ma, 2017).

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