

GENDER DIFFERENCE TOWARDS SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AMONG THAI ELDERLY

Assistant Professor Supavadee Nontakao, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor Papada Lyn Pitchayachananon, Ph.D.

Sritapum International College

E-mail: supavadee.no@spu.ac.th, papada.pi@spu.ac.th

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are to investigate the current status of social media usage of Thai elderly, to explore their opinions toward factors associated with social media usage and to investigate the gender difference toward factors associated with social media usage. The study was conducted with Thai elderly who are 55 years old or older; they are baby boomers in Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Results indicates that gender differences exist within social media usage; female elderly use LINE and Facebook, the popular social platforms in Thailand, and post very often more than males. However, male elderly spend more hours on smart phone than females. The majority of elderly use social media to stay in touch with friends. Males report for sharing opinion on social media than females.

Keywords: Gender Difference, Thai elderly, Social Media Usage

1. Introduction

Age structure of the population in many countries are changing into more ageing society. This demographic phenomenon is a consequence of declining fertility and increased longevity. This ageing of the population is having profound effects on social and economic dimensions of many countries including Thailand. Thailand has been moving closer towards an ageing society since 2005, as the number of citizens aged 60 or older has steadily risen (NESDA, 2019).

The world has seen a rapidly ageing population with respect to the increasing social media. In the same way that social media has become part of the lives of children and young people it is being used by senior citizens as well. Social media statistics from 2019 show that there are 3.2 billion social media users worldwide, and this number is only growing. That equates to about 42% of the current population (HelpAge International, 2019). Similarly, in Thailand the total number of active social media users in 2018 is 51 million accounted for 74% of the total population (Herhold, 2018)

A growing concern related to the growth of the elderly population is social isolation. Social isolation can be understood as a low quantity and poor quality of contact with other people. This includes the number of

contacts a person has, his feelings of belonging, and how satisfactory his relationships and his engagements with others are (Coto et al., 2017). Social media has proven to be an effective way of helping senior citizen improve independence outcome. It can play an important role helping the elderly to keep social connections.

For many decades, gender differentiation has been studied as an interdisciplinary topic and within a variety of fields such as psychology and social science. It is universally accepted that behavioral differences are rooted in the different biological roles, and are reinforced by a society's values and cultural beliefs (Whiting & Williams, 2013). The study of social media usage is essential for understanding how gender role influences the differences observed in the structure and evolution of these social interactions. Although it does not provide answers regarding the origins of the gender differences in social behavior, it can help identify and understand these discrepancies to a larger extent.

2. Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to collect useful data on the elderly and their usage of social media in order to add up more insight information for any related organizations to plan an effective policy to support better use of the social media for them in the future. Specifically, the objectives of this study are

1. To investigate the current status of social media usage of Thai elderly
2. To explore their opinions toward factors associated with social media usage
3. To investigate the gender difference toward factors associated with social media usage

3. Related Literature Review

3.1 Thai Elderly and Social Media Usage

Thailand had reached the status of an aged society in 2005 and the elderly population is increasing at the unprecedented rate of 4% per year. In 2016, Thailand had a population 64.4 million. Of the total 9.8 million were 60 years old or older (15.2%). Thailand will become a super aged society in year 2031 when 28% of population will be elderly (Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, 2018)

As people age, their physical capacities begin to degenerate, they have limited mobility and their response time is much slower. Such a limitation in their mobility often results in less participation in social activities, which may tend to increase feelings of loneliness, and decrease morale and satisfaction with life (Lin and Chou, 2013). Social needs are important basic human needs. Older adults need to stay healthy and community-dwelling. The feeling of connectedness to others and to a community or neighborhood contributes to wellbeing as well as a feeling of independence.

It is also well known that for the elderly, their health and well-being depends, to a greater extent, on the emotional and social relationships they have with their family members and friends (Cornejo et al., 2013). Technology can play an important role helping the elderly to keep these social connections. It can improve their quality of life by reducing their sense of isolation, contributing to their psychological well-being and sense of empowerment, and supporting their relationships regardless of time and location (Cornejo et al., 2013, Lin and

Chou, 2013). Older adults represent the fastest growing portion of the Thailand’s population and their social needs can be satisfied through participation in social networks. Social media is a means for connectedness, participation and independence of the older adult.

However, when considering the social media use by age groups, it was found that the age 18-34 year group has the highest rate of social media use 62.40% while the elderly group has lower rate of 7.4%

Table 1: Social Media Audience Profile of Thailand

Age	Percent of Social Media Use		
	Female	Male	Total
13-17 years	2.70%	2.10%	4.80%
18-34 years	30.30%	32.10%	62.40%
35-54 years	12.80%	12.60%	25.40%
> 54 years	3.90%	3.50%	7.40%

Source: Herhold, 2018

3.2 Gender and Social Media Usage

From Table 1, percent of social media use between female and male of age more than 54 year group is slightly different. There is little reason for concern about sex inequalities in social media access and usage. However, male and female tend to use social media differently. Rowntree (2018) reported that gender differences in frequency and intensity of social media usage remain. A number of studies have found significant gender differences in social media use, although gender differences are not consistent across studies (Kasahara et al., 2019; Meri-Tuulia et al., 2017; Verma & Dahiya, 2016)

Technology has its own gender divide in favor of men. Our culture is defining computers as pre-eminently male machines (Lockheed, 1985). Based on a meta-analysis of English and American studies on gender differences and computer attitudes, Whitley (1997) concludes that, in general, females have less positive computer attitudes than males. However, some studies found no gender difference for computer behavior. A Canadian study among teacher candidates, for instance, did not establish a difference in computer attitudes between men and women (Shapka & Ferrari, 2003).

It seems logical, if not right, for women to be under-represented in social media too. Apart from this general reason, the attitude of women versus men towards voicing opinion, particularly in relation to the response they get, plays a significant role towards relative female silence in social media. This reticence of women in social media is largely a result of the unfavorable, and even often abusive, responses they get purely on the basis of their gender (Kasahara et al., 2019).

Studies in the United States have also shown that there are gender differences in social media usage. A large study conducted in 2015 found that Instagram and Snapchat are dominated by girls in the United States with 61% of girls using Instagram compared to 44% of boys and 51% of girls using Snapchat compared to 31%

of boys (Lenhart, 2015). Videogames are more male oriented with 84% of boys playing video games online compared to 59% of girls. Another study conducted in 2013 found that 60% of adolescents have a private Facebook profile, which means that they only allow their friends to see their profile (Madden et al., 2013). This was significantly different by gender with more females (70%) having a private profile compared to males (50%). However, as the social media becomes more and more integrated into society and as more people have access to and use social media, the so-called gender gap, if it did exist at all, would now be narrowing. But here, too, there is no consensus. This leads us to question the extent to which social media usage differ between men and women.

4. Research Methods

This study used a cross-sectional study design and it was conducted at Bangkok Metropolitan Region. The questionnaires were distributed to Thai citizen who are 55 years old or older; they are baby boomers who were born before 1964.

The administered questionnaire yielded 392 completed surveys. The sample consisted of 216 females (55%) and 176 males (45%) ages 55 to 82 years old. The mean age was 65.25 years (SD 2.324). The questionnaires were handed to those elderly who attended National Elderly Day 2019 arranged by Department of Older Person (DOP), Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, during 9-10 April, 2019 at Government Complex, B Building. The questionnaires were analysed by using percentage, mean, standard deviation, Z-test and Chi Square

5. Results

5.1 The Elderly Experience and the Usage of Social Media

According to the survey, at present most elderly (80.7%) did not use social media at all and female elderly were found that had used less of social media than male ones (59.5% and 71.3% respectively). For ones who have used the social media, it was found that most of these people have been using social media for more than 5 years (30.3%) and less than 6 months (18.2%). Male elderly showed that they had more experience using social media than those female ones by using the social media for more than 5 years (52.9%) and the females who had been using the social media less than 6 months (25.0%). For people who were between 55-65, most of them have been using the Internet for more than 5 years (33.3%) but the ones who were 75 or older have no experience in using the social media at all.

5.2 Social Network Platforms

Frequencies were run to gain percentages for the data. LINE (55%) had the largest percentage of elderly using it daily while Instagram had the lowest percentage (19%). Additionally, 39% of elderly reported that they post to LINE very often compared to only 16% posting very often to Instagram. However, Facebook (35%) had the second highest percentages of elderly posting very often to its sites. These results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Social Media Usage

Social media platform	Percent using daily	Percent posting very often
LINE	55	39
Youtube	50	12
Facebook	21	35
Messenger	13	21
Instagram	19	16

Gender Differences for Social Media Platforms

LINE and Facebook both had significant gender differences in usage. According to a chi-square test of independence, there was a significant relationship between elderly's gender and how often they post material on LINE, $\chi^2 = 14.95$, $p < .01$. As seen in Table 3, males were more likely to report never posting (41%) than females (37%), and females were more likely to report posting very often (25%) than males (14%). A similar significant relationship was found for Facebook, $\chi^2 = 13.78$, $p < .01$. Males were more likely to report never posting (36%) than females (26%), and females were more likely to report posting very often (23%) than males (12%). These results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 3: Percentages for Gender and Posting on LINE

Gender	Frequency of Posting on LINE				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Male	41	10	17	19	14
Female	37	19	16	13	25

Table 4: Percentages for Gender and Posting on Facebook

Gender	Frequency of Posting on Facebook				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Male	36	9	16	27	12
Female	26	12	21	18	23

5.3 Electronic Devices

The elderly used several devices to access social media. The results of this study indicated that 78% of elderly used smartphones, 36% used computers, and 8% used an iPad or tablet device to access the web. Elderly reported using smart phones the most with an average of 3.18 (SD=2.01) hours per day, iPad or tablet device were used with an average of 2.87 (SD=1.85) hours per day and computers were used the least with an average of 1.59 (SD=1.94) hours per day.

Table 5: Electronic Device Usage per Day

Electronic Device	Average Hours on Social Media
Smart Phone	3.18 (SD = 2.01)
Computer	1.59 (SD = 1.94)
iPad or Tablet Device	2.87 (SD = 1.85)

Gender Differences in Electronic Devices

According to a chi-square test of independence, there was a significant relationship between an elderly's gender and how many hours a day they spend using a smart phone, $\chi^2 = 14.79$, $p < .05$. As seen in Table 6, the percentage of males (9%) using a smart phone more than four hours a day was three times as high as females (3%). Additionally, females (55%) were more likely to report using a smart phone less than one hour a day than males (34%).

Table 6: Percentages for Gender and Hours Spent on a Smart Phone per Day

Gender	Time Spent on a Smart Phone				
	<1	1-2	2-3	3-4	>4
Male	34	23	16	18	9
Female	55	15	15	12	3

5.4 Reasons for Social Media Usage

The elderly used social media for several reasons. The results of this study indicated that 42% of elderly used social media to stay in touch with what friends are doing, 40% used social media to stay up-to-date with news and current events, 39% to fill up spare time, 37% to find funny or entertaining content, 32% to share photos or videos with others and 30% to share opinions.

Gender Differences in Reasons for Using Social Media

A chi-square test of independence found that there was a significant relationship between a elderly's gender and reason to share their opinion, $\chi^2 = 13.67$, $p = .05$. As seen in Table 7, females were less likely to share their opinion (45%) than males (32%).

As seen in Table 7, the percentage of males (20%) sharing opinion very often was about 2.5 times as high as females (8%).

Table 7: Percentages for Gender and Sharing Opinion

Gender	Frequency of Sharing Opinion				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
Male	32	15	16	17	20
Female	45	19	17	11	8

6. Discussion of the Findings

There is only minor portion of elderly who use the social media in their daily lives. The age factor was mentioned in a study conducted by National Statistical Office (2019) which found out that the access to the Internet is decreased by the passing age. Hogeboom et al (2010) had also supported this hypothesis in their study showing that 62 % of people who were in their 50-64 years old had been using the Internet but there were only 10 % of ones who were in their 65 years or older that used the Internet. The social media usage also had some relationships with both genders that numbers of female elderly who used the social media was lower than males. The same result in genders and the Internet also showed in Ferro et al. (2011) who found out that female had negative relationship with the access to the Internet.

The results of this study supported the hypothesis of significant gender differences occurring within social media platform. LINE and Facebook both had significantly more females using those sites often. This is similar to the results found in the Thailand (Mahittivanicha, 2019) and suggests that social media sites are being used in a similar way by Thai elderly. The findings are consistent with Atanasova's findings (2016) that females use social media to connect with people and prefer visual platforms while males often use social media to find information and prefer text platforms.

The results also supported the significant gender differences on times spent on social media via smart phones. Thai elderly had mostly used social for less than one hour per day. However, males spent longer hours per day on social media via smart phone than females. In terms of usage objectives and the activities, the data showed that most elderly liked to use the social media for connecting with their friends and for staying up-to-date with news and current events. These findings were supported by Whiting and Williams (2013) who stated that social media was used for social interaction for 88 percent and information seeking for 80 percent.

7. Recommendations

This paper demonstrates the current status of social media usage of Thai elderly. Thai elderly has the lowest rate of social media usage compared with the other age groups. And the main reason of social media usage is social interaction: a place to interact and socialize with others. It is very challenge to narrow down this gap and to increase their engagement with the others. Social media gives them a social life. The government agencies should promote the other beneficial usage of social media and to provide training on how to use social media as a means of learning new skills and gaining new knowledge.

The study also provides evidence that gender is influencing social media usage. The future study should look at other factors influencing social media usage such as attitudes, privacy and cyberbullying.

8. Acknowledgement

At present, Thai society is confronting the process of population ageing. This population dynamic poses serious challenges for traditional family support, communities' ability to provide backup support for older persons and government policies. A series of national surveys of the older population together with related analyses and

extensive studies by Thai and foreign researchers in the academic community provide important information for evidence-based policies and programs for improving the welfare of elderly.

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