Whether or not adolescents will be better at dealing with conflicts by using social media?
Abstracts

With the development of the Internet technology, social networking has become a necessary component of daily social interaction. And it is of great significance to the study of social group communication. To some extent, it has changed ways of people’s thinking and communication. This article is written to describe how internet communication relates with adolescents’ abilities to deal with interpersonal conflicts. The purpose of this study at social networking, specifically the activities of using social media accounts and its impact on communication and conflict resolution skills. This research, conducted on 627 American and Chinese citizens from the age group ranging from 10-50+ year old, suggests that although youth individuals hold the similar attitude to their parents that face-to-face interaction the most effective and preferred means to communicate and resolve conflict with others, participants reported using social networks to communicate and resolve conflicts in everyday life. The results also indicate that individuals participate in daily social networking activities at a higher rate compared to other age groups. Further research is necessary to examine how social networking relates to the skills of communication and conflict resolution and its impact on interpersonal functioning for the group of adolescents.
Background

Adolescent is a period when adolescents often experience strong negative emotions that may overwhelm their already weak inhibitory control (Pechmann et al., 2005). They are using social media to reinforce existing relationships and social connections (Subrahmanyam et al., 2008). Such sites offer today’s youth a portal for entertainment and communication and have grown exponentially in recent years (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Social media, such as Facebook, are changing the ways couples are developing their relationships (Farrugia, 2013).

Social media is becoming increasingly popular in recent years due to the rapid progress of technology and popularization of digital devices. They have different characteristics compared to conventional communication methods. For instance, they are more prompt, dynamic and mobile compared to e-mails and telephones, and less likely to convey meanings via non-verbal cues compared to face-to-face conversation. The latter, however, includes two types of behaviors which are verbal behavior and non-verbal behavior, (Copyright 2008, by the Contributing Authors. Cite/attribute Resource) and in this case more of the meaning of the things people say is transmitted in the way people say it than in the words themselves. If without effective communication, interpersonal conflicts, which are ordinary circumstances, occur in building interpersonal relationships. Basically, the most common conflicts are about hobby, work, study and emotion problem. For adolescents who are native to the Internet, will
there be a different circumstance compared to other generations when dealing with these problems, especially when taken the usage of social media into consideration?

Investigating the positive aspects of social media on adolescents will help people gain recognition of the impact of media. Also, people will be able to understand adolescent’s ability to deal with conflict at the standpoint of social media. This study mainly focuses on to what extent does ability to deal with conflicts varies based on communication methods, specifically how do social media affect the ability of adolescents to deal with conflicts. It is hypothesized that adolescents are better at coping interpersonal conflicts.

**Hypothesis**

This paper will investigate the relationship between social media and adolescents’ ability to solve conflicts. To some extent, the internet may become an important tool to solve problems.

Based on internet, social media will probably make adolescents better at dealing with conflicts. Apart from the idea that adolescents might be better at dealing with conflicts by using social media, adolescent’s might also choose different methods to solve conflicts according to different relationships.

Since adolescents uses social media for various of purposes, those purposes of using
social media may cause different kinds of conflicts among adolescents. Different kinds of conflicts including but not limited in the relationships between parents, friends, classmates or boyfriends/ girlfriends. According to different relationships, adolescents will have different attitudes, which will then might cause their choice of communication. Social media is not the only way to deal with conflicts in people’s daily life.

Except using social media, there are better or worse ways to deal with conflicts as well. For example, talking in person is thought to be the most effective way when dealing with conflict. As a result, we will investigate whether or not adolescents will choose different methods to solve conflicts based on their relationships and attitudes. After investigating whether or not social media will improve adolescent’s ability to solve conflicts, the preference or reasons behind using social media will also be investigated.

Compare to adults who prefer solving conflicts directly, usually talking face-to-face or talking on the phone, adolescents prefer seems that they are more likely to use less direct ways such as social media. There are several speculations which make adolescents more likely to uses social media. To a large extent, their preference is driven by the advantages of using social media. Using social media reduces the chances that people meet. Without directly meeting the person in your particular relationship, perhaps there are more chances to deal with the conflicts. The conflict might be less intense, and as a result, the severity in a relationship might also reduce.
Apart from the characteristic such as fast, there are also additional strengths such as emoji or images which direct communication doesn’t have. With these emerging options in communication, adolescents can get access to those new options. Since adolescents are a group of people who are adaptive, flexible to changes of tools or environment, adolescents are relatively more adaptable to them and use those in their daily communication, especially when facing conflicts. As a result, there will also be investigation on the advantages of using social media from the perspective of adolescent.

In a nutshell, the paper will investigate firstly, the whether or not adolescents are better at dealing with conflict. Secondly, whether or not they will change their methods to solve conflicts based on their relationships and attitudes. Last but not least, the advantages of using social media from the perspective of adolescents compare to adults.

**Design**

The researchers plan to use quantitative method in the form of a survey to measure a variety of potential influences on adolescents’ ability to deal with interpersonal relationships. The survey was a questionnaire consisting of 8 multiple choice questions that measure the respondents' attitudes, contexts and behaviors on the usage of social networking, and a scale assessing the impact of social networks on their interpersonal relationship. The survey, along with a brief description was distributed randomly both
Sampling

To discover the exclusive relevance between how internet communication effect adolescents to deal with conflict during the process of building relationship, it is essential to compare horizontally with other age groups.

Adolescence is the vital time of growth and maturation in many areas: physical, emotional, and social (Newman, 2004) and possess special characteristics compared to other age groups, and these areas of growth are informed by a modern-day adolescents’ social media presence (O’Keefe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Moreover, the growth of age can potentially expand an individual’s social network both in true life and in the virtual world, and this dramatic increase in social networking may deal significantly different consequences to adolescents.

Due to the goal of this research to accurately discover social networking activities and the ability to cope with interpersonal conflicts, the age of subjects of this research was limited to 10-18. However, in order to more genuinely capture the potential consequences of social networking exclusively on adolescents, the researcher recognizes that it would be representative to form a cross-sectional investigation by measuring attitudes and practices of social networking of other age groups. In this case,
due to the accessibility of subjects and their relevant experience on this topic, the researchers applied two different sampling approaches: convenience sampling targeting pedestrians around Harlem and Columbia University, and snowball sampling by spreading online surveys via the social network account of the adolescents.

In this case, this population will cover a wide range of age groups with a considerable proportion of adolescents from various backgrounds, and requires no parental permission. As a result, the questionnaire will primarily focus on the adolescents but also cover a wider age group from 10 to 50+ years old.

**Data Collection**

The survey (See Appendix) covers a wide range of contents, including multiple choice questions concerned the estimated time spent in social networking activities, relationships maintained by social networking, frequency and intensity of social networking activity of surfing on related online sites, and 5-point Likert scales asking participants to rate their attitudes on numerous statements involving aspects of solving interpersonal conflicts and the relationship to social networking.

Since the respondents in the survey remained completely anonymous and the only demographic information collected are the gender and age groups of the respondents, no information that identifies specific respondents was collected. This survey acquired
information on the respondents’ attitudes toward social networking and their actual practices to communicate and resolve conflict via this medium, which is unlikely to discomfort respondents. However, certain respondents may be unexpecting to answer the topics of friendships, relationships and social network, and this may result in some sensitivity to the questions.

Participation in the survey was completely voluntary. The estimated time for completing the survey was 3 minutes.

**Results & Analysis**

**Analysis: Overview**

According to the data acquired from our online survey and paper-based questionnaires, 99.04% of our 628 participants has an account of social media and at least 87.88% people check one of their account every day. Chatting is the most dominant purpose when people using social media (39.07%).

It is discovered that in a typical week, 35.44% people spend more than ten hours using social media, 19.54% people spend 6~9 hours, 22.41% people spend 3~5 hours and 22.61% people spend 0~2 hours. Also, about 87.93% check their accounts on a daily basis. It is apparent that the frequency of people using social media is high, and almost
one third among them are heavily dependent on social networks.

Moreover, the purposes that people communicate with social media are diverse. Approximately 73.18% people prefer to use social media for chatting, 57.28% people for fun, 52.68% people for study and 49.04% people for work. It can be inferred that most people are less likely discuss important events or serious topics on social media, but chat on daily hassles with friends (42.35%).

(Figure 1. Adolescents’ time consumption of social media)

Contrast to the diverse using pattern between age groups, all respondents recognize the advantages of social media. About 88.84% of the respondents believe that promptness is a necessary advantage, 41.15% values the primacy protection of social medias and 19.62% agrees that social media can reduce the embarrassment face-to-face.

**Analysis: Characteristics of Adolescents**

Totally, about 86.43% adolescents think that social media helpful for them to communicate better. Also, unlike adults, adolescents are more prefer to solve conflicts
by using social media (38% over adults' 35%) Here are several reasons supporting this result.

First, adolescents are more likely to be heavy users of social medias than adults. According to 29.07% adolescents spend more than ten hours using social media, 25.97% adolescents spend 6~9 hours, for adults the number is 17.39%.

Second, adolescents are open to new ways of making friends: about 49.43% people agree with the statement that images (emoji for example) when applied to online conversations, can ease atmosphere and reduce embarrassment. About 35.66% adolescents prefer to communicate online to build the relationship with friends, while about 27.39% people overall like to use social media under the same circumstances.

Third, adolescents tend to receive more positive influences from social media make than on people of other age groups on the issue of dealing with interpersonal relationships. 42.91% people feels that they can calm down more easily when typing and 35.82% people think that online communication can help them think logically. In addition, 43.49% people agree that by using social media, they are able to think from another people’s perspective, for adolescents.

Moreover, adolescents tend to use social media for leisure purposes, while adults prefer to apply social media on career context. About 76.74% adolescents communicate with
social media for chatting, 67.05% adolescents communicate online for fun. In contrast, % of adults use them for work. Except the aforementioned characteristics of ‘promptness’ and ‘privacy’, other advantages like helping people calm down and reducing embarrassment and awkwardness are also mentioned by adolescents.

**Analysis: Conflict Coping and Adolescents**

In order to investigate whether or not social media creates conflicts or eliminates conflicts, the survey collected the data on people’s attitude on their intimate relationships. On one hand, both adults and adolescents – about 1/3 (30.46%) of the participants – think they have ended an intimate relationship with someone by using social media. For particularly adolescents, more than 1/3 (34.5%) of the participants have the same respond. On the other hand, both adults and adolescents – about 1/3 (28.87%) of the participants – think someone have ended an intimate relationship with them by using social media. For adolescent, more than 1/3 (33.72%) of the participants have the same results.

As a result, it can be concluded that social media will to some extent end people’s intimate relationships, which may primarily due to conflicts between their relationships, due to the loss of patience due to trivial frictions. And also, they may have different opinions or different characteristics which lead them contradict to another people’s thinking. The social media is not omnipotent; it also has some demerits. Like too much
short sentences may make receivers misunderstand the sender’s thoughts, not answering questions for a long time can create bad impressions to other people. In the worst situation, some people express their negative feelings on the social media to annoy others.

However, in this survey, conflicts in relationships can be seen from an alternative perspective. One purpose of this investigation is to find out that on the bases of social media, whether or not people can use the advantages of social media. Based on the data we collected, it can be proven that social media can improve adolescent’s ability to solve conflicts in their relationships. This includes a 5-point Likert scales to measure respondents’ tendency of response under 10 provided circumstances, in order to reflect people’s choices towards people’s attitude when dealing with conflicts. Apart from promptness, privacy and other mentioned aspects, social networks it also works effectively to assist people, particularly adolescent, to solve conflicts.

Based on the survey that we conducted, there are mainly 5 of the 10 indicators shows that there are more than 2% compare to adults, including:

1. After using my (social media) account, there are less conflicts in my relationships,
2. I prefer using social media to deal with conflicts to talking face-to-face,
3. Emoji can ease the atmosphere,
4. Typing words online helps me calm down,
5. I am able to think from another people’s perspective,
6. Social media has made a positive impact on me in the field of dealing with relationships and conflicts.

There are also two advantages which are similar to adult’s attitude, which include:

1. Social media makes stronger,

2. Online communication helps me think logically.

(Figure 2. Adolescents’ Opinions on Certain Situations Concerning Social Media and Interpersonal Communication)

Seen from the listed indicators, adolescents think that social media has the dominant advantage of (1) with emoji to ease the atmosphere, (2) abler to think from other people’s perspective, and (3) abler to calm down when typing words online. With the advantages of social media, the direct result is that adolescents are more likely to deal conflicts within the social media. Thus, social media can make adolescents better at solving conflicts.
Using question 8 and 9 as an example, according to the data the group collected. These questions ask how does the social media negatively impact on intimate relationship both for part of the people and someone else. As a kind of trend, people of all of the ages are tend to choose “No” for both questions and also their percentage is close to 70%. It is not singly but in pairs. Look at the data for adolescents, the answers for “No” are 65.5% and 66.28%. That means it is general that almost 1/3 of people uses the social media to end up their intimate relationships. The reason why they finish this is because they happen some conflicts. They may break off a fine friendship by trivial things. They may lose patience and attention to others and attach the importance to themselves. And also, they may have different opinions or different characteristics which lead them contradict to another people’s thinking. The social media is not omnipotent; it also has some demerits. Like too much short sentences may make receivers misunderstand the sender’s thoughts. Not answering questions for a long time can create bad impressions to other people. In the worst situation, some people want to become sadists to hurt other people by social media. For adolescents, this survey wants to know how they resolve these conflicts and what kind of way they want to change it.
(Figure 3. Adolescents’ percentage of others ending an intimate relationship with them due to social media)

(Figure 4. Adolescents’ percentage of ending an intimate relationship due to social media)
Limitations and Future Prospects

Due to the nature of this proposal, our preliminary research has its own limitations. Initially we drafted three potential research topics: internet communication, racial bias and inter-racial romance. We chose internet communication as the final idea and expand it to how the internet communication helps adolescents to resolve conflicts. We had whole complete topic and picked up the significant detail points to structure the whole layout. That gives a well beginning. And then, we made a well-designed questionnaire both online and paper copy. We gave all the needed tips and also gave publisher’s name INCITE to be more academic. That makes it look very formal.

We also use polite language during the distribution. Thirdly, we listened advisor’s suggestions. We changed our questions to not directly and be specific about our research questions. We supposed a possible hypothesis for it. We gave a sequence of related reactions to change our project wisely.

For the data collection part, we collected data from the whole ages. It is quite accurate, comprehensive and varied. We could use different types of graph like pie chart, scatter graph and also tables to show our data in a more visual way. And most importantly, we had good collaboration and cooperation skills. Each of us could join every discussion and give their opinions to the theme. We separated our work fairly and worked it well.

However, we had some limitations too. We only got a few days to distribute our survey, we collected data samples but it’s not enough. We want to do the comparison part for
the adolescents and people from different ages, but we got unequal comparison samples which means not persuasive for the audiences and readers. The questions for our survey were not enough to cover some small details like “if you don’t have social media, what will you do?” We were not considering all the possible conditions for this question and we picked it up cursory. Furthermore, we didn’t get any awards for informants and we couldn’t attract them to give us more information. We didn’t get any interviews, because we thought ask someone we familiar was not very evident and ask stranger we didn’t have much time to make he or she trust us to give some details to the internet communication and relationships with conflicts. The weather is another factor disturb our plan, we couldn’t distribute at rainy days and also, we distributed in the afternoon. There were few adolescents in the afternoon. For our data, it was not exact.

Conclusion

Based on the information discovered in our research, it is fair to say that to some extent social media can help adolescents deal with conflicts. Unlike adults who already have mature abilities and their own idea of solving conflicts, usually talking in person, adolescents now have several alternative ways to meet the same purpose. Among different kinds of communication methods, most adolescents prefer to use social media to deal with conflicts, because online communication is an indirect method which allow them to avoid or solve conflicts using limited social skills. It can give them enough space to think reasonably and provide helpful emoji to reduce embarrassment.
Additionally, according to the research, adolescents will choose different methods to solve conflicts based on their relationships and attitudes. Having conflicts with parents, adolescents are more likely to use direct communication methods, while talking with their friends, they prefer to use indirect way. However, because the relationship with parents is special, social media is not so effective for dealing with conflicts. Generally, internet communication has great function on increasing ability of solving conflicts between friends and classmates. Although online communication is not the only way to deal with conflicts in people’s daily life, except the most traditional way talking in person, using social media is adolescents’ favorite methods to solve problems.
Reference:

Allen, Sharee Nicole. 2015. Adolescents, Social Media, and the Use of Self-Portraiture in Identity Formation. Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School.


