



Internet factors influencing generations Y and Z in Australia and Portugal: A practical study

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 May 2013

Revised 3 December 2015

Accepted 10 December 2015

Available online 12 January 2016

Keywords:

Internet influence factors

Generations Y and Z

Australia

Portugal

Positive and negative

Practical study

ABSTRACT

This practical study aims to enrich the current literature by providing new practical evidence of the positive and negative influence factors of the Internet on generations (Gens) Y and Z in Australia and Portugal. The Internet has become a powerful force among these Gens in relation to communication, cooperation, collaboration and connection, but numerous problems from cognitive, social and physical developments' perspective are developed throughout the Internet usage. A quantitative approach was used to collect new, practical evidence from 180 Australian and 85 Portuguese respondents, with a total of 265 respondents completing an online survey. This study identifies new positive factors to the Internet usage, as problem-solving skills, proactive study, information gathering, and awareness globally and locally; communication and collaboration with their peers and family were improved and enhanced. Alternatively, this study identifies new negative factors as physical contact and physical activities were prevented, thinking, concentrating and memory skills were reduced, depressed and isolated, laziness having increased, nevertheless; the Internet encourages Gens Y and Z to play physical and virtual games (e.g. Wii). Finally, this study concluded that the Internet is becoming an essential part of the everyday routines and practices of Gens Y and Z.

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1. Introduction

The Internet is a network of thousands of computer systems utilizing a common set of technical protocols to create a worldwide communication medium. Currently, the Internet has a population of “over 7,259,902,243 million” (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2011a). In Australia the Internet has a population of “over 12.8 million” (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2011b), while in Portugal it is “6.7 million” (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2011c). The Internet is used by different generations, by Baby Boomers (Age: 53–61), Generation Jones (Age: 43–52), Generation X (Age: 30–42), and Generation Y (Age: 18–29), while Generation Z (Age: 17–3) (Genworth, Financial, n.d.).

These massive groups of users access the Internet through their computers and terminals, via educational institutions, commercial Internet access providers and other businesses. The Internet provides numerous benefits to consumers in relation to access to information, entertainment, research, business and marketing. The Internet allows “consumers to educate themselves about the information or products at their own pace, and consumers can instantly access only that information which is pertinent to their needs” (Issa, 2008, p. 11, 1999). The Internet “provide(s) a low-cost ‘gateway’ to the global market

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for companies intending to engage or engaging in exporting, especially for small-to-medium enterprises located in peripheral economies and those operating in global niche markets” (Dou, Nielsen, & Tan, 2002, p. 105). The Internet was invented by Tim Berners Lee, a scientist at CERN,¹ in 1989, and the first implementation appeared in 1990 (CERN, 2002). He was examining various ways to make large amounts of data accessible without using complicated software. Finally, he found “the solution in plain text files, which we now know as HTML” (CERN, 2002; Gray, 1995; Hoekstra, 2000). Development of the Internet has provided the basis for implementation of the World Wide Web (WWW). “The World Wide Web contains a large and exponentially increasing number of websites, ranging from single personal homepages, to large corporate sites containing thousands of individual pages” (Cunliffe, 2000, p. 222).

The growth of the Internet continued with the development of other opened and closed browsers such as Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Safari, Opera, Google Chrome and Netscape Navigator. Many businesses and individuals nationally and universally are using these browsers to access their needs. In general the Internet has become the major component in any business, as it links millions of computers and tens of millions of users around the world (Teo, Lim, & Lai, 1997; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). In addition, Internet usage brings enormous challenges to businesses and individuals, as many observers allege that the Internet is changing society (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001). From the business perspective, new opportunities will be created for businesses to become more creative and innovative, increase their profit and reduce the cost of their marketing activities, as the majority of these activities are performed via the Internet. Beside the above, if the Internet facility is adopted in any business, a unique reputation will be developed, and they will become more successful and exclusive in the market segment locally and globally (Van Dijk, 2006).

On the other hand, from the individual perspective, using the Internet will give them the opportunity to gain cutting edge knowledge, and more collaboration and communication with their family, colleagues, and friends. On the other hand, Internet usage will bring challenges, obstacles, and growing awareness of the potential impacts of the Internet, on cognitive development, social development and physical development (Sigelman & Rider, 2012; Verdick.org, 2011). In respect to cognitive development, individuals will face several problems, such as inability to concentrate in writing and reading, inability to remember (Bergquist et al., 2009; Huang & Lee, 2010; Levy, 2003; Nahl, 2005), and shallow minds, which lead to a lack of deep thinking, distraction and scattered attention, which makes it hard for them to complete their tasks in school or home on time (Carr, 2008). Internet usage also causes some problems with social development, such as health problems, stress, depression and isolation (Amstadter, Broman-Fulks, Zinzow, Ruggiero, & Cercone, 2009; Casale & Fioravanti, 2011; Selfhout, Branje, Delsing, Bogt, & Meeus, 2009). These influence factors will generate enormous challenges for the individuals, their families, and the community. Finally, from the individual perspective, using the Internet will harm their physical development, which means the absence and avoidance of face-to-face meetings between family, friends and colleagues, and a lack of physical exercise (Bargy & Mckenna, 2004; Kilvon, Togher, Power, & Turkstra, 2010; Vitak, Crouse, & LaRose, 2011).

This study is intended to assess the extent to which Internet usage is influencing generations Y and Z in their social and academic life, especially in Australia and Portugal, and targeted Gens Y and Z to observe their behavior and attitudes toward the Internet. This study will answer the following question: What are the positive and negative influence factors of Internet usage by Gens Y and Z in Australia and Portugal? To answer this question an online survey was distributed in Australia and Portugal; there were 180 responses in Australia and 85 in Portugal. This study will also make a valuable methodological, theoretical and practical contribution to the current literature review to the Internet usage by generations Y and Z globally and locally as new factors will be added to the current literature review to the negative and positive influence factors of the Internet. The study's new findings will assist several stakeholders including researchers, academics and personnel in the education sector, as well as families and government, especially the Australian and Portuguese. The new findings confirmed the literature review and identified several new factors. The negative factors that emerged should be addressed immediately by Gens Y and Z in Australia and Portugal.

This study is organized as follows: the influence factors of Internet usage, negative and positive influence factors of the Internet, research question, methodology, participants, results—*independent T-test*, results—*factor analysis*, comparison results: *factor analysis* and *T-independent test*, discussion, implications for theory, implications for practice, limitation and conclusion.

2. Theoretical background: the influence factors of Internet usage

The Internet has become the main channel for businesses and individuals (old and young) to connect, interact and communicate without geographical restrictions, to increase their social involvement nationally and universally. This tool has made the world become smaller and smaller through enabling people to access information, research, education, entertainment and so on. In addition, using this tool will create new relationships, social identities and types of commitment between disconnected people. Business report presentation by Internet facility is more effective, proficient and efficient compared with the traditional ways, and will reduce costs and increase profit for the business as most of its operations are completed via the Internet, such as correspondence and emailing attachments and documents (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2011; Bryne & Lee, 2011; Harris, 2010; Mitchell, Lebow, Uribe, Grathouse, & Shoger, 2011). Alongside the above, use of the Internet by businesses and individuals will reduce the emission of CO₂, since the logistics behind mailing, travel, and other

¹ CERN: is the European Organization for Nuclear Research.

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