

Ethnicity and Social Media Usage

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Introduction

Over the past few years, one type of online application that has seen tremendous growth is social networking (Pemppek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). As Comscore (2010) indicated, "social networking remains one of the most popular and fastest-growing behaviors on both the PC-based Internet and the mobile Web". Due to this type of change, people's communication has changed from fewer in-person interactions to a mix of virtual and impersonal interactions.

One area in Social Media which is relatively understudied pertains to ethnic differences in the usage of social media websites.

In this study, we investigated whether ethnic background was predictive of a social media usage including: which sites were most likely to be used, the main purpose of using these sites, how much time was spent on the sites, and satisfaction associated with social media usage. Although our study was largely exploratory in nature, we expected that African, Indigenous, and Latino Americans would report lower levels of social media usage compared to Asian and European Americans.

Although Asian Americans are more likely to have a collectivist cultural orientation, our study was based in the U.S., which is an individualistic society. Compared to other ethnic groups, Asian Americans have among the highest socioeconomic status in the country (Brooks, 2008; Marger, 2006), which would facilitate their access to social media.

Method

Target Population

Individuals who are:
18 years of age and older

Recruitment

SONA (CSUSB student participation web site)
Web sites (e.g., Craigslist.org) and listservs

Online survey

Social Media usage questions (written by the researchers)
Demographic characteristics

Participants

1,006 Participants
151 Men; 855 Women
Mean Age: 24.36 years, SD: 7.54 (Range: 18 - 72 years)

42% European/White
39% Hispanic/Latino
11% African American
7% Asian American
1% Native American

Place of Residence in the United States:
70% West, 11% South, 13% East, 6% North

Abbreviated Results

Ethnicity and time spent on Social Media Sites

<u>Factor</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
European/White	-.207	.092	-.099*
Hispanic/Latino	-.138	.091	-.068
African American	.027	.124	.008
Asian American	.146	.133	.037
Native American	-.213	.243	-.027

Ethnicity and reason to use social media site : Communication with friends

<u>Factor</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
European/White	.380	.030	.421**
Hispanic/Latino	.354	.029	.408**
African American	.410	.044	.275**
Asian American	.380	.048	.224**
Native American	-.067	.095	-.019

Note * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

Discussion

Contrary to our study hypothesis, there were no significant ethnic differences in terms of social media usage (e.g., "Do you have an account at one or more social networking web sites such as Facebook, MySpace, etc.?").

We additionally did not find ethnic differences related to the popularity of particular sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace). However, we did find support for our hypothesis that European Americans spend more time than other ethnic groups on social media sites.

We also found partial support for our prediction that European Americans would be using social media sites for individualistic reasons (e.g., to form romantic connections). Although not part of our original hypotheses, we found that Asian Americans were using social media sites for more collective type activities such as study groups and networking. All groups used social media to communicate with friends.

A surprising finding was that Latino Americans spent more time online than other ethnic minority groups. One strength of our study was the large percentage of Latino American participants. It is possible that our large sample size enabled such differences to be detected.

A limitation of our study is that participants completed the survey online, which makes our sample a select group who are relatively educated (students were included in our sample) and already using the Internet on a regular basis.

It will be fruitful for future researchers to recruit participants using diverse methods (e.g., random digit dialing, face-to-face interviews) in order to better assess ethnic differences in social media usage. Nevertheless, our study provides a good stepping stone for future research in this area.

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