

Tracing Digital Fragmentation at the User Level: Gen Y & Gen Z from a European Perspective

Tracer la fragmentation numérique au niveau de l'utilisateur : la génération Y et la génération Z dans une perspective européenne

Rastreando la fragmentación digital a nivel de usuario: La Generación Y y la Generación Z desde una perspectiva europea

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Article abstract

This study compares the usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in two non-Anglophone settings. A longitudinal mixed-method approach was designed to gather data face-to-face with Gen Y and Gen Z participants in Lyon (France) and St Petersburg (Russia) between 2011 and 2018, by means of survey, forum and focus groups. The initial differences observed in user behaviour were no longer apparent by 2018. Noticeably similar user behaviour reflected converging SNS consumption. From the findings, we identify socio-technical changes that influence SNS usage, in order to produce a typology of user behaviours for identifying user segments.

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in two non-Anglophone settings. A longitudinal mixed-method approach was designed to gather data face-to-face with Gen Y and Gen Z participants in Lyon (France) and St Petersburg (Russia) between 2011 and 2018, by means of survey, forum and focus groups. The initial differences observed in user behaviour were no longer apparent by 2018. Noticeably similar user behaviour reflected converging SNS consumption. From the findings, we identify socio-technical changes that influence SNS usage, in order to produce a typology of user behaviours for identifying user segments.

Keywords: Gen Y, Gen Z, SNS (social networking sites) usage, ICT

Résumé

Cette étude compare l'utilisation des sites de réseaux sociaux (SNS) dans deux contextes non anglophones. Une approche longitudinale à méthode mixte a été développée pour la collecte de données en face à face avec des participants de la Génération Y et Z à Lyon (France) et à Saint-Petersbourg (Russie) entre 2011 et 2018, par le biais d'enquêtes, de forums et de groupes de discussion. Les différences observées initialement dans le comportement des internautes n'étaient plus apparentes en 2018. Des comportements d'utilisateurs visiblement similaires reflétaient une consommation convergente de SNS. À partir des résultats, nous identifions les changements socio-techniques qui influencent l'utilisation des SNS, afin de réaliser une typologie des comportements des utilisateurs pour identifier les segments d'utilisateurs.
Mots-Clés : Génération Y, Génération Z, utilisation des SRS (sites de réseaux sociaux), TIC.

Resumen

Este estudio compara el uso de los sitios de redes sociales (SNS) en dos entornos no anglófonos. Se diseñó un enfoque longitudinal de método mixto para recopilar datos cara a cara con los participantes de la Generación Y y la Generación Z en Lyon (Francia) y San Petersburgo (Rusia) entre 2011 y 2018, mediante encuestas, foros y grupos de discusión. Las diferencias iniciales observadas en el comportamiento de los usuarios dejaron de ser evidentes en 2018. Un comportamiento de usuario notablemente similar reflejaba un consumo de SNS convergente. A partir de los resultados, identificamos los cambios sociotécnicos que influyen en el uso de las SNS, con el fin de elaborar una tipología de los comportamientos de los usuarios para identificar los segmentos de usuarios.

Palabras Clave: Generación Y, Generación Z, uso de SNS (redes sociales), TIC.

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Advances in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) have attracted much interest from scholars and practitioners, particularly in the field of “social technologies”: *social media* and *social networking sites* or SNS (Panteli & Marder, 2017; Hackley, Hackley, & Bassiouni, 2018; Mubarak & Quinn, 2019). However, prior studies of ICT usage neither reflect nor predict current consumer practises (Macedo, 2017). This study builds on “brick-in-the-wall” research into evolving trends in ICT usage (Kheir *et al.*, 2018), namely SNS—focusing on Gen Y and Gen Z in two non-Anglophone countries (Lichy, 2016; Panteli & Marder, 2017), while acknowledging the subtle role played by language in international management (Brannen, Piekkari & Tietze, 2017).

Technology and user behaviour evolve in tandem (Li, 2015; Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018); social technologies have shifted communication from mass to social (Flanagin, 2017), bringing about new consumer behaviour (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013), a new philosophy (Lichy & Kachour, 2014), new business models (Hackley *et al.*, 2018) and intensifying user interaction (Miller, 2020). Mihailidis and Viotty (2017, p. 441) suggest SNS users are “spending an increasing amount of time in homophilous networks where contrarian views are few and far between”. This view resonates with the “echo chamber” effect, which metaphorically describes how users prefer to interact with ideologically-aligned peers, to share only certain ideas, information and beliefs (Dubois & Blank, 2018). Homophily in SNS is generating new user behaviours (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2013) that can be interpreted as micro digital cultures adapted to local context. Acknowledging Simonson (2015) who studied consumer-generated content, and Kozinets (2016) who highlights the diversity of ICT user needs, this study responds to calls for further research into cross-generation usage of SNS (Panteli & Marder, 2017) and consumption of social technologies (Lomborg, 2017).

The value of a network is closely tied to the number of users connected within it. The conventional wisdom about network value embodied in Metcalfe’s Law, which states that its value is proportional to the square of the size of the network. In contrast, Reed’s Law observes that network value, particularly social networks, grows with the number of groups it supports. SNS use these laws to put a value on their growing networks. However, not all users are equal in SNS, with the result that the idea of increasing value of a network based on increasing connectivity is flawed because it suggests an ideal yet unrealistic interpretation—as demonstrated by Zhang, Liu and Xu’s (2015) comparison of Tencent (China’s largest social network) and Facebook (the world’s largest social network).

Taking a socio-technical perspective, the focus is at the user level in two non-Anglophone countries in which American tech giants exist alongside local SNS that are linguistically- and culturally-adapted for local users. To better understand fragmentation of SNS user behaviour (Cheong, 2009; Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018), our objective is to identify socio-technical changes that influence SNS usage, in order to produce a typology of user behaviours. Socio-technical change recognises that technical and human/social aspects are tightly bound and inter-connected (Moss, 2014). It denotes processes of institutional transition that account for the co-evolution of technology and society (Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018), and is therefore relevant for investigating SNS usage in different contexts.

Studies of ICT usage in non-Anglophone contexts serve as a reminder that non-native speakers attach invisible meanings to information exchanged in English (Cohen & Kassis-Henderson, 2017). While the “gap in the current literature regarding language usage in global social media” (Singh, Lehnert, & Bostick, 2012, p.698) is outside the scope of our study, it is worth noting that “local language preferences for social media usage are strong across the world” (ibid, p.698). As advocated by Vaiman and Brewster (2015, p. 155), “it is very difficult, both theoretically and empirically, to prove that all values related to human behaviour and attitudes at a workplace are determined by culture”. The notion of culture in international management is articulated by Leung and Morris (2015, p.1044), “situational cues, not cultural distance based on personal value endorsements, shape individual behavior through activated schemas and norms”. There are therefore limitations of explaining SNS user behaviour using the essentialist model of language and culture (McSweeney, 2002; Cohen & Kassis-Henderson, 2017). Given that cultural identity is just one dimension of self-identity (Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011), a more holistic approach is needed for researching SNS usage.

The context for this study is France and Russia, two countries that succeeded in creating new social order through “momentous upheaval” (Skocpol, 1976, p. 175). We compare Lyon-based SNS users in France with St Petersburg-based SNS users in European Russia which is the western part of the Russian Federation, located in Eastern Europe (Mälksoo, 2009). In addition to introducing 4G technology at the same time, offering ubiquitous computing (Bhalla & Bhalla, 2010), France and Russia have similar traits of caution, reticence and unwillingness to compromise. Both countries “think big and consider they have an

important role to play—a ‘mission’ in world affairs” (Lewis, 1997, p. 233), which led the president of France to seek a rapprochement with Russia (Moïsi, 2019). This policy of open arms on the part of Macron is a realistic statement of the ongoing interests of France and the rest of Europe (Lasserre, 2019).

The remainder of the paper is divided into a review of relevant literature, methodology, results, discussion, management implications, limitations and further research and conclusion.

Literature Review

The Technology-Driven Lifestyle

ICT have shaped how individuals interact interpersonally and with technology (Kumar, Amit, & Arindam, 2017). Studies emphasise how users connect “on a 24/7 basis through platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google, Instagram, and YouTube” (Ireland, 2015, p.157). While the terms are used interchangeably, *social media* refer to the use of web-based and mobile technologies for interactive dialogue (Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2017), whereas *SNS* are a social structure with people joined by a common interest (boyd and Ellison, 2007). These platforms are used for commercial purposes (Zhang *et al.*, 2014) and networking (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2013) as well as for sharing behavioural details (i.e., likes/purchases) and personal information with other users (Kehr, Wentzel, and Mayer, 2013). They provide a vector for collective formations including networks and communities (Dolata & Schrape, 2014) that constitute a socio-technical environment (Cheong, 2009), wherein SNS represent one form (Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018). An examination of how technical and human/social aspects are interwoven (Emery & Trist, 1960; Tanis, Van Der Louw & Buijzen, 2017) can further the understanding of user behaviour in different contexts (Hajli *et al.*, 2017), when both “social” and “technical” aspects are treated *together* as interdependent parts (Cartelli, 2007).

The literature in marketing, sociology, psychology and information management has traced evolution in SNS usage (Yadav and Pavlou, 2014; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2013; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Li, Cheng, and Teng, 2020); yet, the impact of local context and generation cohort has been under-researched. Identifying current user trends is important for understanding the ongoing digitalisation

of the economy (Fernández-Sanz, 2017; Lichy & Stokes, 2018), especially with the changes occurring worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Raker, Zacher & Lowe, 2020; Somma *et al.*, 2020). It is vital that business, government and policy-makers keep abreast of evolving user trends in order to develop digital solutions for the benefit of society.

The Disruptive Force of Younger Generations

This study focuses on young adult SNS users: Gen Y born 1977-94 and Gen Z born 1995–2012 (Kim-Choy & Holdsworth, 2012; Dhopade, 2016; Strauss & Howe, 2000). The notion of generational difference was pioneered by Mannheim (1952) who described a generation as a cohort raised in the same general chronological, social and historical setting. The position in time and impact of certain common experiences and life-events are central in articulating generational commonalities (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013; Nichols & Wright, 2018), including SNS usage (Kim-Choy and Holdsworth, 2012; Dhopade, 2016). Generational cohorts share common attitudinal, preferential, emotional and dispositional similarities (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Gen Y have been branded “*Millennials*” (Strauss & Howe, 2000), “*Echo Boomers*” (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008), “*Generation Next*” (Martin, 2005), “*Digital Generation*”, “*Generation E*”, “*N-Gens*” (Martin, 2005; Naim & Lenka, 2017b) and “*Gen Me*” (Twenge, 2006). However, “*Millennials*” and “*Gen Y*” are the most popular terms, often used interchangeably (Stewart *et al.*, 2017). In contrast, Gen Z has been labelled “*iGen*”, “*The Founders*”, “*Plurals*”, “*Post-Millennials*”, “*Screenagers*”, “*Centennials*” and “*the Homeland Generation*” (Robb, 2017). Studies of Gen Z often originate from practitioner literature (see Turner, 2015), to explain the changing workforce as older generations—Baby Boomers and Gen X—prepare for retirement (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

Gen Y and Z are the most digital-literate cohorts (Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008; Kim & Hahn, 2012). They are comfortable embracing technological innovation (Venkatesh, Thong & Xu, 2012; Naim & Lenka, 2018) and struggle to conceptualise a world without the Internet (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). The “always-on” mind-set of younger generations has contributed to their ability to multitask (Cardoso-Leite, Green, & Bavelier, 2015), switching between smartphones and tablet computers (Turner, 2015). They are visual communicators (Issa & Isaias, 2016; Wilkinson, 2016), connected via social networks (Conole, 2010)

and collaborative platforms (Kwok & Yang, 2017), and are comfortable disclosing personal information online (Li, Cheng and Teng, 2020).

There are many online activities that they should know *not* to engage in, but still do, such as falling victim to phishing scams (Malbon, 2013) or fake news (Smolkin, 2007). They sometimes appear unaware of the potential dangers of over-sharing information (Van de Pas & Van Bussel, 2015; Li *et al.*, 2020), doubting that employers and recruiters will check data retrieved online (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2012). Their upbringing, need for instant gratification, and 24/7 connectivity have shaped their exorbitant expectations from the workplace (Naim & Lenka, 2017a). Technology reports (e.g., *TechCrunch*) suggest that Gen Y and Z leverage SNS to benefit career development via sites like *Branchout* and *Silp*, which allow users to discover career opportunities through their friends who facilitate introductions into organisations (Butcher, 2012). The way in which Gen Y and Z engage with ICT reveals their values, attitude and behaviour (Kopanidis & Shaw, 2014). They harbour a sense of immediacy and hold high hopes of employers, which has spawned the label “*high-maintenance generation*” (Martin, 2005).

An overarching idea in the literature is that younger generations form a cohort of like-minded individuals who behave in a predictable manner (Valentine & Powers, 2013; Haddouche & Salomone, 2018). There is a tendency to propel the myth that a certain behaviour can be ascribed to a generation—yet, there are as many differences *between* generations as *within* a generation (Lichy, 2012).

The online environment is constantly fragmenting into new user segments (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kallas, 2020), partly as a result of ongoing migration away from global networks to local platforms (Coëffé (2017)—such as *Skyrock*, *Zenly*, *Plato* (in France) and *Vkontakte*, *Odnoklassnik*, *Moi Mir* (in Russia)—and partly as a result of new user behaviour (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2013; Hackley *et al.*, 2018) and deviant user behaviour (Mubarak & Quinn, 2019). In line with socio-technical change in France and Russia, local SNS offer linguistically- and culturally-adapted alternatives to American tech giants such as GAFAM (Smyrniaios, 2016). To illustrate, while Google is positioned as the most widely used search engine worldwide (Yahoo, Bing and Ask, far behind, are nevertheless undergoing constant development), we are witnessing the rise of local search tools by language and country (Singh *et al.*, 2012; Cohen & Kassis-Henderson, 2017), such as *LeMoteur* and *Quant* in France, and *Yandex* and *Sputnik* in Russia (Pimienta & Prado, 2016).

ICT Usage in France and Russia

Using a framework of institutional analysis (Alston, *et al.*, 2018; Slusarciuc, 2019), it is possible to gauge the impact of administrative structures on ICT usage in France and Russia, by examining forms of state intervention, the organisation of markets and firms, the impact of interest groups, legislation and bureaucracy, as well as “soft” forms of knowledge transfer and policy entrepreneurship undertaken by think-anks, consultancy firms, foundations, and the university sector (Ladi, 2000). Socio-technical systems often develop institutional rationalities that are diffused via international networks (Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018), such as defence technology (Kim and Blank, 2019), *energopower* (Tynkkynen, 2019) and economic sanctions against firms that violate the right to privacy and data protection (Vanberg, 2020). The notion of institutional isomorphism that explains peer pressure applied on firms (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) has resonance for individuals (Vanden Abeele *et al.*, 2014; Ilakkuvan *et al.*, 2019), in the sense that individual SNS user behaviour can be attributed to legal or political regulatory pressures. Examples include sanctions against LinkedIn in Russia, underscoring the intersection of geopolitics and cybersecurity, and restrictions on Facebook and Twitter in France to stop spreading fake news during an election campaign (Gaumont, Panahi & Chavalarias, 2018).

In France, the consumption of SNS has been shaped by legislative control in contrast to self-regulation (Breindl & Kuellmer, 2013; Vendil Pallin, 2017). The adoption and usage of ICT has been arduous—partly as a result of obstacles to innovation such as inadequate and ossified infrastructure (Galia & Legros, 2004) but mostly as a result of the socio-cultural context (Lesourne & Randet, 2006; Lichy & Merle, *in press*)—since any change to routine leads to uncertainty and is therefore avoided (Kuhn, 2011). Further barriers include a general lack of interest in standardising Internet infrastructure, insufficient investment from French companies and poor networking among decision-makers (Proulx, 2005)—all of which contributed to sluggish uptake (Fondeur & Lhermitte, 2006).

A ministerial enquiry into the slow pace of digital adoption in France explains that the problem is neither in terms of the equipment nor implementation of advanced technologies; rather, it is in the practices and ability to use technology to collaboratively develop and deliver services online (Lemoine, 2014). Another explanation is that French citizens take time to adapt to technological innovation,

owing to their Cartesian orientation (Kambouchner, 2020; Lichy & Merle, in press); they need a stable and controllable environment (Deroin, 2010). Above all, there is more competition than co-operation for developing technological solutions collaboratively (Chantepie, 2017; Lichy & Merle, in press).

Although France has been described as a nation lacking digital dexterity (Kondratov, 2018), the use of SNS has grown steadily. Coëffé (2017) estimates 32% of French citizens use instant messaging and 56% use social media, of whom 84% are under 40 years old. Acknowledging that statistics do not distinguish between active and inactive usage, Facebook remains popular (27.4m visits/month or 8.4m visits/day), followed by YouTube (25m visits/month or 4.4m visits/day), Pinterest (6.9m visits/month or 500,000 visits/day) and Twitter (5.8m visits/month or 600,000 visits/day); almost a fifth of French users follow brands via social media but fewer than 11% will post a comment online, 25% would use social media to boycott a company—see Statistica (2019).

Furthermore, there is an overall distrust of Facebook-sponsored ads (La Fondrie, 2012) and a preference for offline shopping among young French consumers rather than online shopping, contrary to evolving trends in other countries (Pujol, 2014). The rise of French mobile consumer apps such as *Zenly* and *Tribe* reflects the growing interest in linguistically- and culturally-adapted technology. Other examples include *Qwant*—a French-language search engine (Tisserand-Barthole, 2013); *LeMoteur*—from *Orange*, formerly *France Télécom*; *DAZOO FR*—a search engine for French and Francophone websites; and *Exalead*—owned by *Dassault* (Pimienta & Prado, 2016).

Turning our attention to Russia, it can be difficult to obtain reliable data on SNS usage. State control of the media is a sensitive topic, as it deals with “the internet as an alternative medium for information diffusion, communication and mobilisation” (Lonkila, 2008, p. 1126) and thus raises important issues concerning the building blocks of Russian national identity: citizenship, state—society relations, power and gender. Relying on media commentary such as *Oshkalo* (2014) and *Russian Internet Forum* (2019), local SNS dominate the market: namely, *Одноклассники* [“Classmates” in English, rebranded “OK”], *ВКонтакте* (*Vkontakte*, shortened to *VK*) and *LiveJournal* which is seen as “an important means of personal expression and social and political activism” for educated Russians and the Russian diaspora (Lonkila, 2008; Enache, 2015).

The Federal Security Services “FSB” (main successor to the USSR’s KGB) can intercept any communication—from the largest email provider *Mail.ru* to “OK” and “VK” (Soldatov & Borogan, 2015)—intensifying the legislation that requires bloggers with over 3,000 daily followers to register with the government (Stone, 2014). The concern is that blogs provide an alternative public sphere for civic discussion and organisation that differ from mainstream sources of information (Lonkila, 2008; Etling, Roberts, & Faris, 2014). There is an ongoing problem with trust and information quality rooted in Russian (and, hence, Soviet) information-handling practices (Chepaitis, 2002; Enache, 2015), exacerbated by Internet oligarchs (Lonkila, 2008; Mamut, 2008; DeMartino, 2014; Culnane *et al.*, 2019). Thus, “the FSB-oligarchic alliance that dominates both the state and the economy excels at finding ways to pressure ICT companies to provide the needed access to data flows” (Maréchal, 2017, p.34).

Russia is one of the few countries in which its own national networks are more popular than global networks. “OK” and “VK” are market leaders in Russia, and competition is fierce. Popular among Russian-speaking communities worldwide, VK offers the same multilingual services as Facebook, but also allows users to upload photos and videos, and view pirated copies of domestic and foreign films dubbed into Russian. The use of social technologies offers valuable insights into context-specific user behaviour and political preferences of citizens (Ceron *et al.*, 2014). Russian SNS played a key role in the intense and coordinated disinformation campaign surrounding the Ukraine crisis (Euromaidan Press, 2014; Ionatamishvili & Svetoka, 2015) and other geopolitical incidents (Suslov, 2014; Maréchal, 2017), underscoring institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

For both France and Russia, the consumption of local SNS can be interpreted as preservation of national identity (Lichy & Ramphort, 2019), challenging American hegemony (Maréchal, 2017). In today’s international workplace, managers need to understand how employees engage with SNS; this is relevant for attracting and recruiting Gen Z, as well as for retaining Gen Y (Lowe *et al.*, 2008; Wong, Wan, & Gao, 2017), and especially for managing online collaboration across the different generations that co-exist in the workforce (Lichy, 2016). Managers also need to be aware of how younger generations use SNS to develop and extend their self-identity (Belk, 2013; Hackley *et al.*, 2018) through being

part of an international community online (Goulding, Shankar, & Canniford, 2013) or brand community (Ordun, 2015). Individuals span boundaries by fluidly drawing on the resources of their multiple identities to orientate their behaviour in a specific situation (Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011).

Based on the literature, the following research question is formulated: *Comparing France and Russia, what socio-technical changes influence SNS usage among Gen Y and Gen Z?* By answering this research question, we identify socio-technical changes that influence SNS usage, in order to produce a typology of user behaviours.

Methodology

Drawing from Høkbjerg *et al.* (2016), a longitudinal data collection was chosen to explore evolution in ICT usage between 2011 and 2018 across Gen Y and Z. A mixed-method approach was used, involving: (1) a pilot study with a survey (in 2011), (2) a forum (in 2013), (3) focus group discussions (in 2018). The intention of the pilot study was to generate data from each generation concerning routine consumption of ICT. A post-survey forum was then organised in 2013 during which Gen Y and Gen Z were confronted with the survey results from 2011. Finally, with the results of the forum, focus groups were organised five years later in 2018 with Gen Z only, as they now represent a significant proportion of the workforce using SNS, to ascertain the evolution of SNS user behaviour. Focus groups are a suitable tool for complementing the forum data and are often used in qualitative research to reveal differences in perspective between groups of individuals through the social interaction of a group (Kitzinger, 1994; Barbour, 2008; Stokes & Wall, 2014). One of the key features is group dynamics; the type and range of data generated through social interaction is often richer than data obtained from one-to-one interviews (Guest *et al.*, 2017). Although online commentators—such as Viard (2017) and Coëffé (2017)—have “measured” ICT usage, they fail to distinguish between “active users” and “inactive users”, fake profiles and people with multiple profiles on the same SNS. This omission produces inaccurate data, generating an unrealistic snapshot of usage. Hence, the need for focus groups, to ascertain further information on **how and why** Gen Z engage with social media and SNS.

The procedure followed for each step is detailed hereafter.

Pilot study with a survey. In 2011, we conducted a pilot study with “block-release” apprentices (i.e., graduate trainees, working full-time and attending a management development course part-time) in Lyon and St Petersburg. Owing to the lack of reliable information regarding the social media environment, we developed a survey from the literature available to create initial knowledge. The survey questions were intentionally broad to elicit information on routine ICT usage. Using a snowball effect to collect data, the survey was first distributed to the “block-release” apprentices and yielded 236 responses from different generations: Baby Boomers (N=57; 61% female), Gen X (N=63; 65% female), Gen Y (N=73; 59% female) and Gen Z (N=43; 60% female)—from which we chose to focus on Gen Y and Z, as they represent a growing proportion of the workforce. This distribution of ICT usage per generation in 2011 is representative of the users at that time, with the eldest Gen Y being 34, and eldest Gen Z being 16 years old.

Forum data collection procedure. Next, the survey findings were presented at a forum organised in September 2013 in both locations (i.e., Lyon and St Petersburg) to the same participants of 2011 (i.e., block-release apprentices), to whom the survey was administered on a voluntary basis at first, then using the snowball effect to collect further data. A forum gives participants a chance to communicate and exchange their experience and opinions (Im & Chee, 2006)—which, in the case of our forum, gave the participants an opportunity to discuss the survey findings in depth, adding more detail to enable validation of the understanding of SNS usage. Comments raised by the participants in the forum were transcribed manually, as written quotations and notes, and translated into English by the authors, then checked by a linguist. Then, the comments raised in the forum were manually sorted thematically using Template Analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010) to generate a number of major themes (see tables 2a & 2b). Full and equal attention was given to each comment with the aim of identifying interesting aspects that formed the basis of repeated themes. Coloured highlighter pens were used to make notes on each transcript being analysed; attention was paid to surrounding data to avoid losing context. Two additional academics were asked to analyse the transcripts independently in order to reduce bias while developing the themes.

Focus groups data collection procedure. Five years later, six focus groups were held mid-2018 face-to-face with the Gen Z participants (i.e., also block-release

apprentices); 3 groups in Lyon and 3 groups in St Petersburg, composed of six participants each and maintaining equal gender split. The intention was to gather contemporary views on SNS usage; the aim was not to compare generational differences *per se* but to investigate the thoughts, experiences and behaviours of Gen Z regarding the themes raised during the 2013 forum. Comments raised by the participants in the focus group discussions were transcribed manually from video recordings and translated into English by the authors, then checked by a linguist. The same procedure as the forum comments was used to analyse focus group discussions.

Results

2011—Pilot Study: ICT Usage By Generation

In 2011, we observed an overall increase in the amount of time spent on ICT by the younger generations: Gen Y and Gen Z (Table 1 & Figure 1). To confirm this observation, we ran a Multinomial Logistic Regression on SPSS with “Spent Time on ICT” as a categorical outcome and “Generation” as the categorical factor to explain the variation. Results indicate that, in 2011, users were more likely to spend time on ICT if they were younger ($R^2 = .12$ [Cox & Snell], $.13$ [Nagelkerke] Model $\chi^2(12) = .30$, $p < .003$). In particular, whether a user was a Baby Boomer significantly predicted whether h/she spent an hour or less on ICT ($b = 2.82$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 5.58$, $p < .018$; odds [Exp(B) = 16.80; CI95% [1.62: 174.51]] compared to other generations ($p > 0.5$). In contrast, Gen Y and Gen Z spent at least 2 to 5 hours on ICT ($b = 2.64$, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 5.87$, $p < .015$; odds [Exp(B) = 14.12; CI95% [1.66: 200]] but not significantly more [$p > 0.5$] at that time. These first results indicate that across the generations, Gen Y and Gen Z had already integrated SNS usage into their routine behaviour, evidenced by the large part of their time dedicated to it.

2013—Forum: SNS are Perceived and Used Differently in France and Russia

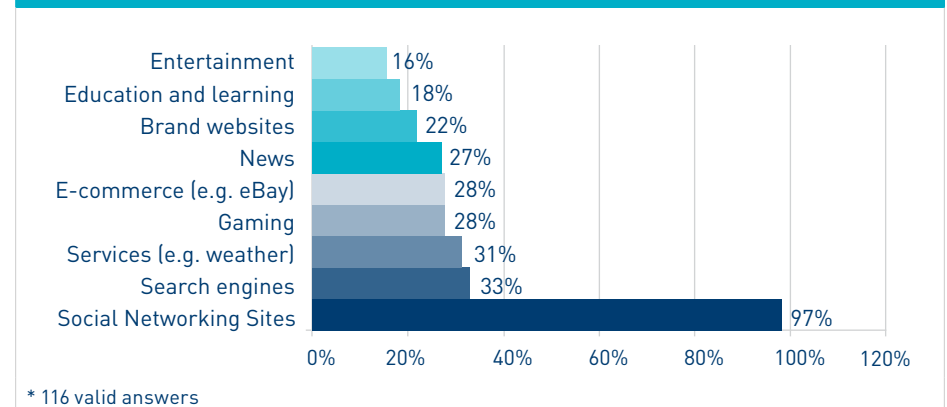
Referring to Table 2a [Highlights], the comments raised in the forum reflect divergence in the perceptions of SNS, main attributes and main drawbacks of using SNS. The Lyon-based participants cited the practicality and convenience of using SNS for undertaking professional and non-professional activities, acknowledging the wide choice of devices and platforms available, and appearing aware of the

TABLE 1
Time Spent on ICT per Generation

	Baby Boomers (N=57)	Gen X (N=63)	Gen Y (N=73)	Gen Z (N=43)	Total (N=236)
An hour or less	12,3%	4,8%	2,7%	2,3%	5,5%
Between 2 to 5 hours	29,8%	20,6%	27,4%	2,3%	21,6%
Between 6 to 10 hours	24,6%	28,6%	20,5%	34,9%	26,3%
Between 11 to 20 hours	24,6%	23,8%	26,0%	32,6%	26,3%
More than 20 hours	8,8%	22,2%	23,3%	27,9%	20,3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source : Descriptive findings from the survey (in 2011)

FIGURE 1
Overall type of site visited by Gen Y & Gen Z*



potential dangers of SNS usage. In contrast, the St Petersburg-based participants mentioned the novelty of using SNS for communicating beyond borders and accessing free online services, while recognising the inconvenience of hackers.

Referring to Table 2b [forum analysis], consensus was reached among the participants on four core themes in each setting: *lassitude*, *distrust*, *boredom*, *deviant user behaviour of SNS* [in France] and *fascination*, *novelty*, *access to information*, *freedom of speech* [in Russia]. The themes reveal Gen Y interpretations of SNS consumption, as well as their attitudes and thoughts. At that point in time, 2013, many new users were flocking to SNS, generating new online communities and new user behaviours—including networking, creating online

identity, building trust in the online environment, multitasking across different devices [personal and professional], as demonstrated by Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2013). The participants acknowledged the ease and convenience of SNS for keeping in touch with others worldwide, yet disliked marketing efforts via SNS, namely advertising and prospecting—confirming Dolata *et al.* (2014).

The limits of commonality were evidenced in the participants’ interpretations. The Lyon-based participants did not perceive SNS as a novelty; they demonstrated a more functional usage of SNS for sharing content, accessing information and identity building. Furthermore, they indicated a certain cynicism regarding the use of SNS for attention-seeking and people-watching, and an awareness of the manipulation of SNS for subtly stalking other users. By contrast, the St Petersburg participants identified SNS as an *alternative* channel for communicating [rather than a *main* channel], perceiving SNS as the epitome of the post-modern global lifestyle. They raised a further issue concerning users whose voice and expertise are being shared and recognised online. Finally, both sides raised negative comments on the potential security breach that these platforms allow, as well as the intrusiveness of advertising and the increasing use of personal data. Tables 2a and 2b summarise the findings.

2018—Focus Groups: SNS Usage Defined by Gen Z

By 2018, there were no observed differences in SNS usage that could be attributed to the essentialist model of language and culture [McSweeney, 2002; Cohen & Kassis-Henderson, 2017]. There was commonality in the comments raised by the participants in Lyon and St Petersburg, indicating converging SNS usage, in contrast to the data collected in 2011 and 2013.

The focus groups encouraged dynamic debate among the participants by creating smaller group discussions. We divided the data gathered into two tables: *What we do on SNS* [Table 3] and *How and why we use SNS* [Table 4].

In their descriptions of routine activities undertaken via SNS [Table 3], the participants in each setting referred to eight common themes: *online identity, extended self, compartmentalisation, disclosure, participation in online brand communities, dark sides, self-promotion, conformity*. These themes underscore the importance attached to creating and managing the online profile, having multiple SNS accounts for sharing diverse aspects of daily life, distinguishing

TABLE 2A
Highlights of post-survey forum: user insights (in 2013)

	Lyon-based participants	St Petersburg-based participants
Perception of SNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SNS are less of a novelty now, - Practical for using own devices to access SNS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SNS usage is part of the modern “connected” lifestyle, - SNS offer an alternative channel of communication, endorsed by the emerging middle classes
Main attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convenience of keeping in touch with friends worldwide, - Option to offload or delete an app if no longer using it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lure of having an outside window on the world, - Free services such as music & video streaming, - Any user can become a key opinion leader/ influencer
Main drawbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Too many other platforms and apps to choose from, - Emerging unpleasant “dark sides” of SNS usage, - Too much advertising and prospecting on SNS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accounts are regularly hacked - Users get too much advertising, prospecting and spam

action from thoughts, the notion of sharing personal content and identifying with like-minded others, and the need to belong [conform] to the online community. They also recognised potential dark sides of SNS usage including oversharing content and deviant user behaviour.

In their explanations of routine activities undertaken via SNS [Table 4], the participants in each setting cited nine expressions of how they manage user-generated content [UGC] and interactivity, and why they use SNS: *profile picture, status updates, personal opinions, brand communities, undesirable traits, “you are what you post”, social crutch, intergenerational, renegades who shun SNS*. These themes offer further insights into their SNS-driven lifestyle, including using SNS as a channel for visually expressing personality, updating other users regarding a particular service, project or person, maintaining dialogue, showing allegiance, recognising/avoiding undesirable user behaviour, taking ownership for UGC, acknowledging the fake veneer of SNS, and perceptions of older and non-users.

TABLE 2B

Gen Y 2013—forum analysis of their own behaviour from 2011-survey*

Lyon-based comments	St Petersburg-based comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - social technologies are widely used by young adults - many apps are used concurrently - growing interest in 4G innovations - “voting with feet”: changes to privacy settings cause users to “switch off” - growing awareness of deviant user behaviour (e.g., voyeurism, stalking identity theft, hype, privacy scares, hacking, revenge porn, etc.) - too much advertising and marketing content on SNS - if one friend boycotts FB for a few weeks (to “get out of the public eye”), this triggers similar behaviour from 20–30 close friends - younger users are astute at navigating online, therefore faster and more targeted - users are fickle, switching from one platform to another; it only takes one person to criticize a site and everyone moves on to the next big “wow” - SNS are a means of social identity: herding or avoiding the same content <p>SUMMARY: Lassitude of using SNS, distrust, post-hype boredom, aware of deviant user behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people are hooked on social technologies: a virtual window looking outside Russia - the novelty attracts new users to join global SNS, like Facebook, in Russia - users enjoy the free entertainment (music and film) provided by SNS - perceived benefits of using SNS outweigh dark sides: stalking, loss of privacy, hacking VK and selling data on dark web. - 4G technology embodies the post-modern global lifestyle - mounting deviance (trolling, phishing, cyber-bullying, etc.) - ordinary netizens can become international opinion leaders - SNS offer a platform for extraverts to broadcast random minutiae - SNS provide a practical communication channel (for the emerging middle classes) in an overtly-censored setting - SNS are increasingly used to coordinate social unrest, propaganda and political uprising <p>SUMMARY: Fascination of using SNS, novelty, access to information, freedom of speech, despite drawbacks</p>

* The participants were shown their own results from the 2011 survey during the 2013 forum organised with the same sample. They were asked to comment on these results and to further explain whether their answers were still valid or if the context had changed and how.

TABLE 3

SNS usage defined by Gen Z from focus groups in 2018: What we do on SNS

Themes	Definitions & verbatim examples
Online identity	Building and creating one’s identity requires utmost attention for choosing the appropriate profile picture (self-portrait or avatar), tone of message, frequency of updating profile picture, use of selfie or professional photography, posting user-generated content and clips.
Extended self	Status updates are viewed as an extension of one’s self (more intimate and revealing) than a profile photo; oversharing is frowned on, seen as synonymous with attention seeking. More “friends” online than offline.
Compartmentalisation	Distinction between status updates (“ <i>what I am doing now</i> ”) and personal opinions (“ <i>what I think</i> ”). Awareness of keeping some opinions offline such as sexual suggestiveness and over-sharing of drunkenness, xenophobia or homophobia. Notion of using “PM me” (private message) as a pseudo-veiled cry for help/attention.
Disclosure	Older generations (Baby Boomers & Gen X) are perceived as “non-sharing” owing to being uninformed or overcautious, and “something to do with age”.
Participation in online brand communities	Notion of “following” favourite brands and being part of brand communities. Conscious use of “like” to show brand affinity, aspiration and belonging (whether or not the brand is consumed).
Dark sides	Awareness of undesirable traits manifested on SNS such as instability, dependency, self-centredness, vanity and sycophantic behaviour, using SNS as a “crutch”; and, also, attention-seeking by tagging “friends” in content posted.
Self-promotion	Reflect the modern trend to broadcast one’s life via SNS and contribute to online reviews (replacing physical interaction)—clear need for constant communication and information sharing with a wide network of people.
Conformity	Pressure to be part of a recognised online in-group/community; not having an account on SNS is perceived as “suspicious”; being part of an online community—Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter or Pinterest—is considered critical.

TABLE 4

SNS usage defined by Gen Z from focus groups (in 2018): How and why we use SNS

User content & Interactivity	How users manage content & interactivity
Profile picture/video	The profile picture conveys a user's personality, real-time location and activity (socially and professionally)—ranging from poised selfies, “brand selfies” to professional portraits for self-promotion. Selfies are ideal for disclosing festive events, vacation settings, seasonal greetings, celebrations, parties, pets, sports, arts and family life. A profile video is used for publicising hobbies, humour, events and news updates. An anonymous profile picture sends out the wrong signal: “hiding behind the screen” and “it speaks volumes about the user”.
Status updates	Status updates are more private, revealing a user's whereabouts, thoughts, what they are doing at the moment, such as views on job applications, their love life, political ideology, society, and reflections on how the day is going. Statuses are very mood-revealing, more common among outgoing people (inclined to divulge information) than among observer-bystander people (who tend to be more voyeur).
Personal opinions	Personal opinions are aired via SNS. Users share intimate details of their private life, revealing their consumer profile and enabling businesses to anticipate their needs and wants based on the information posted. Some users thrive on creating sensation and suspense by posting a wild statement then adding ‘For more information PM (private message) me!’
Brand communities	Brand communities offer users an interactive space to engage with a brand. Users “like” and follow their favourite brands and brand influencers, as a means of aspirational consumption and identity forming, though they may not consume that brand. Yet, the amplification of what brands say about themselves and the positive aspects others are saying about the brand are nothing more than an echo chamber.
Undesirable traits	Undesirable traits include behaviour that reflects emotional instability, vanity, attention-seeking, egotistical, sycophantic shallowness. Some users focus on their physical attributes to seek compliments from friends to increase their own self-esteem. They post provocative updates such as “ <i>look how hot/sexy I am</i> ” with the most seductive look on their faces. Boasting is common, such as “ <i>do you want to touch my triceps</i> ” (striking a pose for the camera), or “ <i>you can only imagine what kind of catch I am</i> ” (plus the seductive look). These users crave public reassurance to legitimise their efforts to be more influential. They are dependent on SNS, always tagging friends to widen their audience of potential followers.
“You are what you post”	“You are what you post” conveys how self-identity is formed and extended by user generated content and interactivity. SNS are the ideal channel for connecting with other users in real-time. There is an endless need to share and broadcast personal information to family, (close) friends and acquaintances. Users dedicate time and effort to curating and managing their identity (and privacy) in one of two ways: the “ <i>Chinese Wall</i> ” approach (when a user creates two individual online accounts to separate their personal and professional accounts) and the “ <i>Living Brand</i> ” approach (users have a single account for personal and professional life).
Social crutch	SNS provide a social crutch , encouraging self-inflicted pressure (a “herding” instinct) to be part of a group or community, for capturing the attention of others. Users often have more friends online than offline, deliberately associating with prominent figures in society or politics (radical or moderate) to assert their own views. They post about the groups that they belong to (corporate or community), religious affiliation (from radical to atheist) and sports clubs, to complement their personal/professional identity (confidentiality permitting); this level of content is invaluable for data analysts, both corporate or government. Our whole life is available at a click yet we remain oblivious.
Inter-generational	The “ Old ” generations (namely, Baby Boomers & Gen X) are more cautious of SNS; they avoid disclosing too much information and tend to keep their personal opinions and daily life private, together with their social views and political stance. Older users use SNS mainly to keep in touch with younger family members (who taught them how to use SNS).
Renegades who shun SNS	Most people want to be up-to-date and see what is happening online, to follow global trends, humorous videos and viral news. Renegades who shun SNS are people without an account face comments like “ <i>Really, how do you survive like that?</i> ” or “ <i>Seriously? I don't believe you!</i> ” Given that SNS are a means to an end for communicating self-identity and achieving social recognition, anyone who chooses to stay offline is a marginal member of modern society.

Next, using the approach put forward by Gabor (2009), we classified the focus group comments into relatively homogenous groups, to produce a typology of Gen Z user behaviours. Eleven distinct user types were identified (Table 5): *the inactive/passive voyeur, the active/dynamic interactor, the social butterfly, the bling-bling user, the over-sharer, the cocky know-all, the professional user/hobby-promoter, the NO-profile-picture, the I-don't-care-for-that-account-but-I-have-one user, the iMessenger user, the serious clubber*. The detailed descriptions provided in Table 5 for each profile allows us to identify certain user types and traits that may lead to SNS dependency, dark sides and deviant user behaviour. The typology reflects the multiple, diverse user groups that exist to date, and the reliance upon SNS for *continuous* communication and sharing content; they give an indication of the complexity of managing Gen Z SNS consumption.

Discussion

In response to the research question, the SNS user behaviour observed in France and Russia has been shaped by both top-down adoption (institutional management of infrastructure and governance) and bottom-up deployment (based on local user needs and peer pressure among users). The pressure from peers (Vanden Abeele *et al.*, 2014; Ilakkuvan *et al.*, 2019) is a factor that is filigree (in watermark) throughout the study, although it was not the focus of investigation *per se* in the forum and focus group discussions. Peer pressure is an interesting phenomenon, hard to investigate, and needs more attention.

We identify a number of socio-technical changes that influence SNS usage, particularly the inception of 4G, local SNS and collaborative platforms, which work together to drive interactive dialogue, networking among people joined by a common interest, and sharing content. The changes in user behavior reflect the co-evolution of society and technology, epitomised by users engaging with digital devices via local SNS adapted to their needs. The findings also show that local SNS are used alongside global SNS, with the result that there is both convergence (similar user behaviour between users in France and Russia) and fragmentation (multiple identities and online communities) among Gen Y and Gen Z.

Based on the data collected, a number of socio-technical changes can be identified that influence SNS usage. In the 2011 Pilot study, the results indicate the extent to which Gen Y and Gen Z had already integrated SNS usage into

their routine behaviour, alongside using other online services such as e-commerce platforms and information sites (see Table 1 & Figure 1). However, between 2011 and 2013, there was a shift in user expectations in France, reflected in a lassitude that can be partly explained by the growing caution and/or disinterest in certain SNS; and partly by concerns about data privacy and security. For example, in both settings there is evidence of homophilous networks (Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017) characterised by “echo chambers” (Dubois & Blank, 2018) in which users herd together on SNS or, conversely, boycott and avoid the same content on SNS (see Tables 2b & 2b). This seems to indicate that the pressure from peers is much greater than the influence of institutional structures (i.e., processes that operate within the socio-technical environment) in shaping user behaviour.

Yet, there is evidence of divergence in SNS user behaviour that can be attributed to institutional structures. For example, the issues raised by St Petersburg participants concerning the dark sides of SNS usage (i.e., VK user accounts being hacked and sold on the dark web) can be linked to the institutions that manage SNS in Russia, such as the FSB-oligarchic alliances (DeMartino, 2014; Maréchal, 2017). Divergence in user behaviour may also be caused by SNS design. Facebook is more user-friendly but VK offers numerous applications, live-streaming and sharing media files. At the time when Facebook was focused on profile pages and status updates, VK was functioning as Spotify, Facebook and YouTube combined. Despite the dark sides, VK retains users by offering Russian-language pirated entertainment including music and films. Many Russians prefer VK but feel coerced into having a Facebook account for prestige, social identity, and international networking. For the Russians, Facebook provides a “virtual window looking outside Russia”, but VK offers greater network value for Russian-speaking users than Facebook—c.f., Metcalfe’s and Reed’s laws (Zhang *et al.*, 2015).

In France, Facebook appeared to be failing to engage with users, but for different reasons. For the French, Gen Y users grew weary of the marketing efforts and undesirable user behaviour, pointing to the need for Facebook to find a balance between passive listening and loss of privacy in order to attract new users. These observations indicate the extent to which both peer pressure and institutional structures are shaping user behaviour.

TABLE 5

A typology of Gen Z SNS user behaviours

User type	Description
the inactive/passive voyeur	Inactive/ passive voyeurs have an account but rarely log-on, preferring to observe rather than use SNS. They tend not to have a profile photo, and if they do, they keep it the same picture for a long time or use an avatar. They avoid posting status updates and revealing any tangible information about themselves. Often, they use a fake name or pseudonym. They stay present on SNS purely to keep informed of what other people are doing. In this category, the users are mostly introverts (but also includes parents of younger SNS users who create an account to keep track of their children's daily activities).
The active/dynamic interactor	Active & dynamic interactors will be multitasking across different devices and platforms, always ready to interact instantly with others. In addition to regular status updates, they will change their profile photo about once a week, and more frequently for attention-seekers. They live on smartphones and tablet computers, sharing minutiae on diverse topics, to air views, debate, socialise, and post content such as a daily video clip. While they enjoy sharing information and connecting with peers, their behaviour can easily turn into addiction.
The social butterfly	The social butterfly will communicate interactively with friends and family. They change their profile photo approximately once a month and typically publish regular status updates on their activities, lifestyle, pets and children, to highlight their social achievements.
The bling-bling user	Bling-bling users love to show that they have money and a high quality of life. They post status updates of having fun each weekend, driving luxury cars, wearing huge fine watches, even images of bank notes. They even "like" their own posts, photos and videos. Always, their profile picture is themselves and never anyone else or a close friend, because they have so few genuine close friends.
The over-sharer	Over-sharers post too much information on too many diverse topics, often via Instagram and Snapchat. Most of the time, they appear to be broadcasting their own content but on closer inspection, they are merely re-posting content (e.g., articles, photos, videos and locations) copied from other users' pages. Nothing they post is ever original or even ground-breaking.
The cocky know-all	The cocky know-all is always online, claims to know everything about anything, likes to post all day long, tags friends on photos and videos, comments on every subject, and answers within 30 seconds on iMessenger. If you send them a post, they snap back " <i>Yep, nice, I saw it 2 weeks ago</i> "—but we all know that it cannot be true! Pure fake. This user typically has 5000+ Facebook friends but knows less than a tenth of them.
The Professional User/Hobby-Promoters	Professional User/Hobby-Promoters are active on several different devices and platforms (especially LinkedIn and Twitter). Their goal is to make their account resemble a trustworthy source of information, in order to attract new followers who will "like" their content. The aim is to find new customers for their wares, often a side-line to their full-time job. They avoid posting non-professional images (e.g., social events), preferring to post content that appeals to the interests of the group (e.g., news updates). There is a planned schedule for regularly updating the profile picture and status, in an attempt to rouse interest and generate dialogue.
The NO-profile-picture User	NO-profile-picture Users (often older Gen Z) prefer to use an avatar or scenery picture instead of a photo. They enjoy the ease-of-use and convenience offered by SNS for keeping in touch with people who are close to them—usually next-of-kin and the extended family. They take care when choosing information to post, to give the right tone and impression to their online contacts. Users who want to keep their private life offline also belong to this group.
The I-don't-care-for-that-account-but-I-have-one user	The I-don't-care-for-that-account-but-I-have-one users have a profile picture (often several years out of date) to show that they exist, but they fail to see the need to use a recent photo or post status updates. They are typically inexperienced in selecting pertinent information to share. They have opted for not sharing their whole life on SNS but feel that they have to have an account.
The iMessenger user	iMessenger users subscribed to popular SNS (often Facebook) several years ago but are now tired of it. However, they keep the account for chatting with friends and acquaintances via instant messaging. They no longer post or comment on content, or even wish friends "happy birthday" anymore!
The serious clubber	Serious clubbers seek to enhance their social life and satisfy their hedonistic interests. When they post content, it is purely for publicising a social event to attend. Their friends who join in will post "harmless fun" photos of the clubber completely drunk with a glass or bottle at hand. They are regularly tagged on funny drunk pictures on Snapchat and Instagram, oblivious of the impact.
The stalker	Stalkers never post or comment, but read everything to keep updated with what is going on. They spend (a lot of) time on a SNS when they get bored, to kill time or to satisfy curiosity. They set up an account purely to observe, to stalk friends and even other people who are not friends, with a view to becoming friends in the future.
The addicted user	Addicted users can be recognized by their frequently changing content (status updates and profile picture); their usage is obsessive and excessive. No further explanations needed.

From the 2018 findings relating to Gen Z only, we confirm previous literature that suggests Gen Z engage with SNS across many different devices and apps, often concomitantly (Cardoso-Leite *et al.*, 2015) for networking (Butcher, 2012), interacting (Goulding *et al.*, 2013; Ordun, 2015) and online identity building (Belk, 2013; Hackley *et al.*, 2018). In line with Belk (2013) and Hackley *et al.* (2018), findings confirm that Gen Z use SNS to enhance self-identity by forming and curating online identities (Goulding *et al.*, 2013) that can be promoted to the wider online community (Ordun, 2015); they remain aware of the pros and cons of SNS usage, such as technological obsolescence being a *fait accompli* to replace the “old” with the “new”—hence the migration towards more recent SNS such as Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter or Pinterest.

The observed differences between Gen Y user behaviour (Tables 2a & 2b) and Gen Z user behaviour (Tables 3 & 4) can be explained by the generation effect and the socio-technical environment at that time. Gen Y and Gen Z were born into time periods marked by technological achievements (including Internet telephony, cellular phones, smartphones, streaming, and social networking). However, Gen Z *grew up with* mobile devices that shaped their user behaviour, as interpersonal communication and interaction through SNS became increasingly normalised. Thus, whereas there was emerging apathy among Gen Y towards SNS in the 2011–2013 time period, in contrast Gen Z perceived belonging to online communities as indispensable, in order to avoid suspicion.

These findings substantiate previous studies confirming that individuals differ in the features that they expect from SNS (Cardoso-Leite *et al.*, 2015), the type and amount of personal information they disclose (Li *et al.* 2020), and the influence of peers (Vanden Abeele *et al.*, 2014; Ilakkuvan *et al.*, 2019) and processes that operate within the socio-technical environment (Cheong, 2009; Fuenfschilling & Binz, 2018). The findings provide information with which to develop management implications and a typology of user behaviours.

Management Implications

This study has implications for managers who are targeting Gen Y and Gen Z with marketing messages; it is worth noting that generational cohorts are defined by birth year, not current age. Hence, acknowledging Gen Y born 1977–94 (today aged 27–44) and Gen Z born 1995–2012 (today aged 9–26), Gen Y are no

longer “block-release” apprentices; that life stage is now dominated by Gen Z. Gen Y are now concerned about different issues and are receptive to a new set of marketing messages. Regardless of age, individuals will always belong to the generation into which they were born.

There are also implications for managers who line-manage Gen Y and Gen Z, in terms of understanding their SNS engagement. Gen Y and Gen Z will *expect* to use the latest interactive, mobile technology for work, life-long learning, and socialising. They are adept at multitasking across different devices and platforms, interacting in real-time with other users (Cardoso-Leite *et al.*, 2015), using their own devices in tandem with corporate software. Given the ease with which Gen Y and Gen Z divulge information online (Li, Cheng and Teng, 2020), managers need to be aware of the issues it can lead to. Some Gen Y and Gen Z employees may need guidance to help avoid/reduce unwanted disclosure of information that may not seem harmful, yet could be potentially damaging for the individual and/or for the employer’s reputation.

For effective communication with employees, managers need an awareness of intergenerational SNS user preferences (Lichy, 2016) and the user behaviour of future employees—i.e., job applicants and interns (Wong, Wan, & Gao, 2017). Managers need to recognise how Gen Y and Gen Z leverage SNS to enhance career development via sites like *Branchout* and *Silp*. Verifying user behaviour and online identity has become an imperative for employers (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2012). While managers cannot “regulate” the user behaviour of employees, they need to participate in online dialogue, to build rapport and gain understanding of their colleagues’ online identity/identities, expectations and lifestyles (Peled, 2011). In response to concerns raised by participants regarding dark sides of SNS usage—i.e., deviant user behaviour (Mubarak & Quinn, 2019)—managers are advised to seek legal advice and draw up user guidelines, clarifying what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable user behaviour.

In terms of digital dexterity (Kondratov, 2018), Gen Y and Gen Z have a sound working knowledge of ICT at a utilitarian level (i.e., how to use a piece of software for its intended purpose). However, it is debatable whether they can use ICT beyond that level or indeed for reflective thinking or strategic problem-solving. Managers are thus recommended to audit employee skills in order to address training needs, focusing on the skills that will help them flourish and adapt to the changes coming to the workforce over the next decade.

To finish, as Gen Z steadily enters the world of work, we provide “keys” (a typology) for identifying SNS user behaviours to assist managers recognize and understand this cohort (see Table 5). Further changes can be expected as socio-technical change interacts with transnational convergence to generate an SNS-dependent lifestyle that is context-specific. Keeping abreast of evolution in SNS usage requires agility and flexibility in management thinking and business models; managers need to conceptualise the co-evolution of society and technology as an undetermined praxis, requiring awareness, collaboration and bricolage.

Limitations and Further Research

This study has three main weaknesses. Firstly, technology and terminology evolved over the course of the study; thus, the term *ICT usage* was initially used as an umbrella term to refer to any Internet-enabled services consumed by users. Following the widespread adoption of SNS, the focus evolved to *SNS usage*. Secondly, as data were collected from “block-release” apprentices, it omits responses from other socio-professional categories; furthermore, the use of a survey restricts the depth and breadth of views expressed by the participants. Lastly, despite efforts to ensure up-to-date information, this field is in constant evolution and thus data become rapidly obsolete.

Despite these limitations, a number of options exist to extend the study. An ethnographic approach could be employed to explore the evolution of ICT usage over a whole generation (i.e., two decades), in order to examine the pressure of peers in the adoption of new technologies such as 5G. Another possibility would be to compare ICT usage in other non-Anglophone continents, with a focus on developing a framework for comparing the impact of emerging technologies (e.g., web 3.0). To provide a more holistic view, future studies should also include depth-interviews with key stakeholders, particularly app designers, community managers and web developers, focusing on technical and human/social aspects to provide new management insights.

Conclusions

We contribute to knowledge by identifying and explaining socio-technical changes that influence SNS usage among Gen Y and Gen Z in France and Russia. The SNS user behaviour reported in this study is characterized by convergence and

fragmentation, two conceptually opposed phenomena that advance simultaneously. While there is noticeable convergence among users in France and Russia, there is ongoing fragmentation in terms of user identities and online communities.

We show that the initial differences observed among Gen Y SNS users in France and Russia are no longer apparent, serving as a reminder of the changing digital landscape and the formation of micro digital cultures, which are linguistically- and culturally-adapted to the local context.

We illustrate how the co-evolution of society and technology is shaped by institutional structures, in which the user behaviour of each cohort is “formatted” by the generation effect and reinforced by pressure from peers. We deduce that the “formatting” of Gen Y and Gen Z takes place through, firstly, the shared events experienced by each generation (e.g., mobile technology, widespread usage of digital devices at home and school). Secondly, through processes that drive conformity including the pressure of constant access/availability of SNS for maximizing status and social opportunities, managing social connections and maintaining relationships, engaging with certain content and boycotting/avoiding other content. Moreover, it was found that individuals who do not “conform” to joining a recognised online in-group/community or who do not have a user account on SNS are regarded as “suspicious” and “a marginal member of modern society”.

We demonstrate the digital dexterity of Gen Y and Gen Z, by detailing their respective consumption of SNS and collaborative platforms. We outline evidence of converging/diverging user behaviour by showing how Gen Z are adept at multi-tasking across multiple devices to satisfy both their professional needs such as networking and career development, as well as their social needs such as interacting in online communities and online identity. The lack of observed divergence among Gen Z in 2018 can be explained by the participants being born and raised in a technologically-sophisticated environment with a shared outlook on SNS.

While individuals worldwide use SNS for everyday activities, there are limits to the convergence. Divergence in SNS user behaviour can be attributed to local factors including institutional isomorphism, government alliances and linguistic preferences. The notion of national/cultural differences reported in the literature was less apparent when using SNS, which suggests that the availability and

usage of local SNS has contributed to convergence. Social technologies are intergenerational and international; they represent a digital space that conforms to the notion of a *global village*, and illustrate a key feature of post-modernity.

More research is needed to provide a framework that explains the evidence within the context of a changing world. Some theories are now outdated/inapplicable in today's global society—such as the traditional concepts that use notions of culture and linguistic difference to predict user behaviour. To this end, we intend to extend this study to other user groups to provide new insights into the digital culture of young SNS users in a rapidly changing society.

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