

Use of the Internet and traditional media among young people

Research Paper

Abstract

Purpose —The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of traditional media as well as the Internet among young people in Hong Kong. With the fast development of the Internet, the use of interpersonal as well as computer mediated communication has changed greatly. A study of how young people use traditional and new media is crucial as it enables commercial and social marketers to fully understand the role of mass mediated messages in the lives of youth. As the youth market expands and consumption power increases, marketers need to capture the latest trends in order to reach the young generation.

Design/methodology/approach —A survey of 405 Chinese persons aged 15 to 24 in Hong Kong was conducted in February 2006 using a self-administered questionnaire. Undergraduate students distributed and collected these questionnaires through face-to-face interactions.

Findings —The Internet plays a prominent role among the young people in Hong Kong. A majority of respondents aged 15 to 24 spent one to three hours per day in the Internet. The main reasons for Internet usage were for listening to music and for fun. The Internet was the preferred media choice for information driven activities. Magazines retained importance for entertainment and shopping activities while the television retained importance for news and current affairs. Most of the respondents found useful websites through search engines. Interpersonal information sources gave way to the Internet for obtaining information about sensitive issues.

Research limitations/implications —The participants mostly came from the lower middle class families and they may incline to project good images about people without many possessions.

Practical implications — The 21st century is a digital age. Marketers should face this challenge. They should take an active role in building their online communication platforms. Social services marketers targeting young consumers should establish a strong presence in the Internet.

Originality/value — This paper offers an updated map of the Hong Kong young people's media usage, especially the use of Internet. It provides guidelines for marketers to reach them in a cost effective manner.

Keywords: youth; media use; Internet; television; magazines

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet is undoubtedly the most prominent mass medium today. By March, 2006, there were over a billion Internet users worldwide (Internet World Stats, 2006). The number of Internet users grew by 114 percent when compared with the figure in 2000 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2006; Internet World Stats, 2006). Burns (2006) predicted that the adoption of various information technologies, including Wi-Fi connectivity, RSS feeds, blog authoring and podcasts, will drive Internet usage worldwide. New communication technologies including the Internet have great impacts on the lives of young people than all other technological innovations (Roberts and Foehr, 2004). A study of how young people use traditional and new media is crucial as it enables commercial and social marketers to fully understand the role of mass mediated messages in the lives of youth.

Hong Kong provides an appropriate venue for the study of communication patterns as it is a highly developed economic entity in Asia. In 2006, sixty-seven percent of households in Hong Kong had personal computer connected to Internet (Census and Statistics Department, 2007) and it was one of the highest rates around the world. There were 2.7 million Internet users in September 2006. According to the Internet World Statistics, Internet penetration in Hong Kong ranked number one in Asia and number nine in the world (Hong Kong Trade Development Council, 2006). The Internet infrastructure in Hong Kong is good. The extensive broadband networks allow most of the Hong Kong people to enjoy high-speed Internet connection. With a population of 7 million, there were over 1.7 million registered customers with broadband Internet access accounts in December 2006. Hong Kong's broadband penetration rate (67% of households) was among the highest in the world (Office of the Telecommunication Authority, 2007).

Mass mediated messages are considered as equally important socializing agents as parents and schools in the lives of contemporary youth (Comstock, 1991; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002). Media contents and the contexts of media usage can and does influence youngsters' belief, attitudes, and behaviors (Roberts and Foehr, 2004). Previous research on media usage of children and adolescents found that the amount of time spent on various media correlated to social and demographic variables (Bower, 1985; Christenson and Roberts, 1998; Comstock, 1991; Comstock and Scharrer, 1999). For example, boys spent more time on computers and video games. Television viewing increased until age 12 and leveled off while listening to music began at around 9 and increased throughout adolescence.

Young people make active choices of the media they use according to their

personalities, socialization needs, and personal identification needs (Arnett, 1995). The uses and gratifications theory proposed by Blumler and Katz (1974) predicts that young people will select and use the media to best fulfill their individual needs. Now with the increasing penetration of Internet in Hong Kong, it's time to update the knowledge about how this new media may affect young people's allocation of time spent with various media, as well as how the Internet can be used to fulfill various communication needs. The current study has the following research objectives:

1. to investigate how young people in Hong Kong allocate their time across traditional and new media
2. to examine how media choice vary by activity
3. to study how often young people use the Internet for different purposes
4. to study how young people find the websites that are of interest to them
5. to investigate how young people obtain information about sensitive issues

By studying how young people use a variety of media to satisfy their communication needs, commercial and social marketers can design strategies about media messages and channel selections to reach them in a cost effective manner.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication is an integrated part of our society. Communication tasks in a society include sharing of knowledge, socializing new members, entertaining people, and gaining consensus through persuasion or control (Schramm, 1977). The person or the institution responsible for carrying out the communication tasks changes with time. For example, parents used to be the major socializing agents in a traditional society, while the schools and the mass media are now playing a more important role in socializing new members in a modern society (Schramm, 1977). Exposure to mass media, in particular the television, was considered a major socializing agent for adolescents (Mangleburg and Bristol, 1998). With new forms of media emerge and the convergence of media technology, the patterns of media usage will inevitably be undergone rapid changes.

The Internet represents a fantastic world of opportunity for children and young people, filled with both good and bad consequence. Considerable attention and concern are now focused on how the young consumers use the Internet because they are seen as the 'digital generation,' at the vanguard of new skills and technologies, yet also vulnerable and at risk (Livingstone, 2003). In a survey of 11,368 young people aged 6 to 16 in 12 European countries and Israel, Livingstone and Bovill (2001) found that, the percentage of respondents with a personal computer connected to a modem varied from 7 percent for Great Britain to 32 percent for Israel. Time spent on television and

and audio media was significantly higher than that spent on electronic games, video and books. Cluster analysis resulted in four major media user styles labeled as low media users, traditional media users, specialists, and screen entertainment fans.

A characteristic of the new ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) is the multi-function capacity. For example, a computer can be used for searching information as well as for listening to online broadcast programs. In order to understand how the young consumers use the Internet and the traditional media, we need to look into the specific uses or the specific motivations. Although research about the Internet has grown exponentially along with the development and spread of ICTs, it still remains a comparatively small body of literature (Kim and Weaver, 2002). The study of young people's Internet use is undeveloped, although key questions of academic and policy significance have focused on the dangers of such use (Livingstone, 2003).

Young people and Internet

Children and the youth are generally enthusiastic adopters of the Internet for communication, entertainment and education. Children regard the Internet as a flexible medium, and research has identified (in rank-order) the following motives for using it: affinity with computers, information, entertainment, boredom avoidance, online social interaction, and off-line social interaction (Valkenburg and Soeters, 2001). They often consider themselves to be more expert on Internet than their parents (Livingstone and Bober, 2003).

Although children and young people enjoy the digital web experiences and integrate them into their daily lives, Internet use harbors negative impacts, both real and potential. Online dangers include exposure to improper contents, the risk of encountering exploitative and dangerous contacts, as well as issues of privacy, advertising and commercialism (Turow, 1999; UCLA, 2001; Williams, 2000).

The digital divide

A number of studies have identified attitudinal and behavioral differences between societies and cultures that use the Internet (Bonfadelli, 2002; Lenhart et.al., 2000; National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2000). Unlike television viewing, where parents can execute mediation and control confidently and smoothly, monitoring Internet use is much more complicated. For example, certain television program genres (cartoons and educational shows) can quickly be judged as safe. Parents found it difficult to mediate the use of Internet. Even if parents logged online, they would have a narrower range of personal goals online and use Internet at a smaller range of places (Loges and Jung, 2001).

Uses and gratifications theory

The uses and gratifications theory proposed by Blumler and Katz (1974) assumes that media users are goal-oriented. They play an active role in selecting and using the media to best fulfill their individual needs. The uses and gratifications theory shifts the emphasis of media communication studies from an effect perspective to an audience perspective. The uses and gratification theory assumes that the media users have a variety of choices to satisfy their needs and each medium can have different functions. Uses and gratifications theory is now widely accepted for nearly all kinds of mediated communication tools (Lin, 1999). Elliott and Rosenberg (1987) remarked that audience' motivations to use a certain type of mediated communication have been studied through this theory whenever a new communication technology is introduced. For example, the uses and gratification theory was adopted in the study of how adolescents used new technology including VCRs (Lin, 1993), the impact of VCRs and cable TV on the passing-time and companion gratifications from watching television (Perse and Courtright, 1993), and the relationship between motivations and consequences of using the Internet (Ko, Cho and Roberts, 2005). A recent study of 189 teenagers aged 14 to 19 in U.S. found that the major use of the Internet was for research and homework. Male respondents used the Internet more frequently for games, music, shopping while female respondents used the Internet more frequently for fashion and information about colleges/universities. Respondents found out websites mainly by using search engines and asking friends. Respondents considered the Internet the most preferred sources of communication about sensitive issues when they need information fast (La Ferle, Edwards and Lee, 2000).

The youth market

The global youth market is important to international marketers and advertisers because of its size and its homogeneity. Giges's (1991) study found the life styles and consumption habits of people age 14 to 34 around the world to be similar, especially in the consumption level of soft drinks, beer and footwear. The Asia youth market is an important target market for products as well as social ideas. Among the population of 1.8 billion youth aged 10 to 24 in the world, 1.01 billion (i.e. 61%) are in Asia (Nugent, 2006). Due to improvement in educational level and household income, individual Asian markets are becoming much more similar to the West in terms of personal aspirations and consumption patterns. The marketing environment in Asia is also moving its focus towards a Chinese audience as China contributes one-quarter of the world's population. As Asian Chinese markets grow, multinationals need to gain a better understanding of these markets before formulating their advertising strategy (Tai and Wong, 1998). Young consumers are now making the online world their milieu, their domain for entertainment, education and the development of personal relationships (Spero and Stone, 2004). We therefore need more research to better understand the

media behavior of young consumers, so as to establish a link with them.

There are 1.9 million of young people aged 15 to 34 in Hong Kong, contributing 28 percent of the total population (Census and Statistics Department, 2007). They have been targeted with advertising about clothing and accessories, mobile phones and electronic consumables, travel as well as online banking services. As there is no urban planning zoning policy that separates the residential areas and the retail shops in Hong Kong, many shopping malls are in close proximity to residential as well as school areas. A snapshot of the malls during a weekday lunch hour finds a lot of young consumers shopping and dining in their school uniforms. APM, a mega mall that targets young consumers, opens 24 hours a day to attract traffic flows.

To conclude, youth are an important market segment and there is a need to update statistics about how they use new and traditional media in the light of the Internet age. Information about how they get information about websites and sensitive issues is needed for commercial and non-profit marketers to reach them in a cost effective manner.

3. METHOD

Procedure

A survey was conducted to examine the use of Internet and traditional media among Chinese young people in Hong Kong. The target population was young people aged 15 to 24. Undergraduate students at the Department of Communication Studies of Hong Kong Baptist University were asked to recruit respondents through their personal network. Hard copies of the questionnaires were distributed through face-to-face interactions. Respondents were requested to fill out the questionnaires by themselves. A briefing session was conducted with the interviewers about the objectives of the study and the exact meaning of all the questions. All the questions in the questionnaire were close-ended. A Chinese questionnaire was drafted based on La Ferle et al.'s (2000) study about U.S. teens' use of the Internet and traditional media. One of the authors translated the original English questionnaire to Chinese. Back translation was conducted by the other author to ensure consistency in meaning. A pilot study of five respondents aged 16 to 21 was conducted. Some wording of items was revised according to the pilot study. The data was collected in February 2006.

Measurement

The questionnaire consisted of three parts (see Appendix for the list of questions). The first part of the questionnaire focused on how the young people allocate their time

Respondents' time allocation to the media was measured by asking, "How much time on average do you spend with each medium everyday?" Respondents were also asked which medium they would use for different needs or activities.

The second part of the questionnaire asked about the contexts of the Internet usage. Respondents were asked about their access to the Internet at school, at home, and at work. Questions were about how often the respondents use the Internet for a specific usage. A list of ten usages of the Internet was included in the study such as having fun or making friends. A five-point scale (1 = never; 5 = almost every time) was employed to measure the usage of the Internet for different purposes. Respondents were also asked how they know about specific websites. Respondents reported on a five-point scale (1=never; 5=almost every time) how often they locate websites through various means such as search engines. The third part of the questionnaire asked about the search of sensitive information on the Internet. Respondents were asked to indicate which information sources (parents, teachers, friends, and the Internet) they would like to consult for information about sensitive issues under various concerns, including privacy, comfort level, ease of access, confidentiality, and speed. Demographic characteristics were also collected.

Sample profile

The sample consisted of 405 Hong Kong young persons aged from 15 to 24. Sixty-four percent of the respondents were aged from 20 to 24 and the remaining 36 percent were aged 15 to 19. Among the respondents, forty-two percent were males and 58 percent were females. The sample consisted of mainly full-time students (83 percent). Fifteen percent of the sample had full-time jobs and two percent of the sample worked part-time. Forty-one percent of the respondents reported that their families belong to lower social-economic class. Fifty-six percent reported that their families belong to the middle class. The remaining three percent reported that their families belong to the upper class. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents were living in public rental housing. Thirty-seven percent lived in private housing and twenty percent lived in subsidized private housing. The percentage of population living in public rental housing in Hong Kong is 32 percent (Census and Statistics Department, 2005). Hence, the sample consisted of a higher proportion of less well-off people than the Hong Kong population.

4. RESULTS

Use of new and traditional media

The first research objective was to examine how young people in hong kong allocate their time across traditional and new media. Table 1 summarizes the amount of time respondents spent on watching tv, chatting on phone, reading, listening to radio, doing

homework and Internet surfing on an average weekday. The results show that about one third of the sample was heavy Internet users. About 30 percent of respondents spent more than three hours on an average weekday at home on the Internet. This percentage is higher than all the other activities measured in the questionnaire. Internet use was prevalent at home as well as in the work place. Twenty-seven percent of respondents with full-time or part-time jobs spent more than three hours on an average weekday surfing the Internet at the office. Respondents spent more time surfing the Internet at home than watching TV. Twenty-three percent of respondents did not spend anytime listening to the radio.

Table 1 Time spent with various activities in a day

Activity	N	0 min %@	1 to 59 minutes %	1 to 3 hours %	More than three hours %
Watching TV	404	3	46	42	10
Chatting on phone	405	3	59	34	5
Reading	404	8	68	19	5
Doing homework	334	4	46	44	7
Listening to radio	404	23	57	16	4
Surfing Internet	405	2	17	52	30
(at home)					
Surfing Internet	331	11	53	26	10
(at school)					
Surfing Internet	63	14	30	29	27
(at office)					

The second objective of the study was to examine whether media choice varied by activity. Table 2 summarizes the media choice of respondents by different activities. The Internet was the most popular media for activities related with information search, homework, health education, entertainment, and leisure. Nearly all respondents use the Internet for information search (98 percent) and homework (96 percent). Radio was found the least popular media for most of the activities listed. Magazines were the most popular medium for shopping (62 percent) and leisure (36 percent). Newspapers were the most popular medium for news and current events. Television, a traditional medium for entertainment, ranked second after Internet among respondents looking for entertainment. The result shows that, in the eyes of the young people, the Internet is the preferred medium that can satisfy most of the listed needs.

Table 2. Media choice for different activities

Activity / need	Internet % [@]	Magazines %	Newspapers %	Radio %	TV %
Information search	98	1	1	0	1
Homework	96	1	3	0	1
Health education	43	11	17	3	27
Entertainment	38	24	6	3	29
Leisure	38	36	6	2	19
Shopping	27	62	4	0	8
News / current events	18	1	36	4	42

[@] may not add up to 100 due to rounding

Internet usage

The third research objective focuses specifically how frequent young people in Hong Kong use the Internet for different purposes. Table 3 summarizes the frequency of using Internet for ten selected purposes. Respondents reported that they most frequently used the Internet for music, for fun, as well as for homework. They less frequently used the Internet for making friends, getting information about further education, and obtaining information about health.

There were significant sex differences in the use of the Internet. Male respondents used the Internet more frequently for playing games and making friends than female respondents. Female respondents used the Internet more frequently for homework, getting information about further education, knowing about fashion trend, and obtaining travel information than male respondents.

Table 3. Internet usage by sex and age

Use	Mean@	Male	Female	t-value	15-19	20-24	t-value
Music	3.8	3.8	3.8	0.2	3.7	3.8	-0.8
Fun	3.7	3.7	3.7	0.7	3.7	3.7	0.4
Help with homework	3.4	3.2	3.5	-3.1**	3.4	3.4	-0.0
Games	3.0	3.3	2.9	3.8***	3.1	3.0	1.2
Fashion	2.6	2.5	2.7	-2.1*	2.5	2.7	-1.8
Travel information	2.6	2.5	2.7	-2.3*	2.1	2.8	-8.1***
Shopping	2.6	2.5	2.6	-1.0	2.4	2.6	-2.4*
Making friends	2.4	2.6	2.3	3.2**	2.7	2.3	2.8**
Information about further education	2.4	2.2	2.5	-2.9**	2.2	2.5	-3.5***
Health information	2.3	2.3	2.3	0.4	2.0	2.4	-5.1***

@ 1 = never, 5 = almost every time

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

There were significant age differences in the use of the Internet. Respondents aged 15 to 19 more often used the Internet for making friends than those aged 20 to 24. Respondents aged 20 to 24 used the Internet more frequently for information about travel, shopping, further education and health than respondents aged 15 to 19. The fourth research objective examines how young people find the websites that are of interest to them. This is important to advertisers who are keen to drive traffic to their websites. Table 4 summarizes how often respondents find out about websites using seven selective ways. Results indicate that respondents most frequently locate useful websites through search engines. The next popular way to locate useful websites was through word-of-mouth. They seldom came to know about websites through advertisements. There were no significant sex differences in the ways they found out websites. However, respondents aged 20 to 24 were more likely to locate websites through magazine advertisements, newspaper advertisements, and billboards than those aged 15 to 19.

Table 4. Ways to locate websites by sex and age

Way	Mean@	Male	Female	t-value	15-19	20-24	t-value
Search engines	4.3	4.3	4.3	-0.3	4.2	4.3	-1.7
Ask friends	3.0	3.0	3.1	-1.2	3.1	3.0	1.5
Magazine ads	2.4	2.4	2.4	-0.1	2.2	2.5	-2.8**
Newspaper ads	2.2	2.3	2.2	1.3	2.1	2.3	-3.1**
TV ads	2.2	2.1	2.2	-1.0	2.1	2.2	-1.5
Billboards	2.0	2.0	2.0	-0.0	1.9	2.1	-3.5***
Radio ads	1.9	1.9	1.9	-0.9	1.8	1.9	-1.3

@ 1 = never, 5 = almost every time

p < .01; *p < .001

Sources of communication about sensitive issues

The final objective of the study was to examine how young people obtain information about sensitive issues. We compared the role of the Internet and other interpersonal communication sources. Respondents were asked to select one communication source to find out information about sensitive issues in terms of five different criteria. Table 5 summarizes the source that respondents would seek under different concerns. A mean percentage was compiled for each source for various attributes of seeking information and was presented in the last row. Results show that most of the respondents chose to consult the Internet, followed by friends, parents and teachers for sensitive issues. Respondents tended to choose Internet as the source for getting sensitive information if they wanted to get the information fast, easily, confidentially and comfortably. Speed of obtaining sensitive information was perceived to be the major strength of the Internet in comparing with other personal sources. Fifty-one percent of respondents reported that they would consult friends if they were concerned about privacy.

Table 5. Sources of communication when search for information about sensitive issues

	Parents % [@]	Teachers %	Friends %	Internet %
Need information fast	2	3	24	72
The easiest way	5	2	32	61
Concern about confidentiality	6	5	30	60
Most comfortable way	11	6	38	46
Concerned about privacy	12	5	51	32
Mean	7.2	4.2	35.0	54.2

[@] may not add up to 100 due to rounding

5. DISCUSSION

A survey was conducted to examine how young people in Hong Kong used the Internet for different purposes. It also compares the role of the new media and the traditional media for different activities and for obtaining information about sensitive issues. Results indicate that the Internet has emerged to become the most important media among young people in Hong Kong. Respondents reported that the time spent on surfing the Internet exceeded the time spent on watching television and listening to radio. More time was spent on the Internet than on homework, communicating on the phone, and reading.

The results suggest that the way of accessing to radio has undergone a big change. Over 20 percent of respondents did not spend any time on radio. Over 43 percent of respondents spent less than 30 minutes a day listening to radio. However, it does not mean that radio is a declining medium. Nowadays, radio is converging with the Internet and online broadcasting is becoming popular. Radio stations in Hong Kong put their programs online. Young people can listen to radio programs when they are accessing to the Internet. The introduction of online broadcasting has created a change in the way of listening to radio programs.

In Hong Kong, there is a tendency that traditional media converges with the Internet in order to maintain their presence among young people. For example, some Chinese newspapers post some or all of their news contents on their websites. People can sometimes read these news contents online for free. A television content provider in Hong Kong called "now Broadband TV" transmits television signals to subscribers through the Internet (broadband). The era of media convergence has arrived. As the

Internet integrates the functions of traditional media, people can enjoy media contents such as newspaper articles, television and radio programs on the Internet. The Internet is becoming a multimedia platform. This may explain why the respondents spent a lot of their time on the Internet. Traditional media owners face the challenge of maintaining their presence in the minds of the young audience.

Most of the respondents preferred to use the Internet, instead of magazines, newspapers, radio and TV, in searching information, doing homework and obtaining health education. The Internet won a landslide vote mainly because of its informative nature. Governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutes, commercial companies and even individuals over the world are providing contents on the Internet. With the global effort of content providers and the unlimited capacity of the Internet, information on the Internet is becoming richer and richer. The Internet is now becoming a one-stop information hub. Young people can always find the most updated information on almost any topic on the Internet in a flash. As a result, the Internet was preferred to other traditional media for information driven activities.

Results indicate that the Internet is competing with traditional media in the entertainment and leisure domains. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents chose magazines for shopping information. Magazines are a more selective medium. There are lots of shopping-related magazines in Hong Kong covering news and feature stories about various products such as fashion, cosmetics, consumer electronics, photography, dining and travel. Although shopping information can be found on the Internet, young consumers opt to obtain shopping information through magazines. This may be because the magazine format is easier to read and to share. Further qualitative research is needed to explore how magazines can be better targeted to particular groups of young consumers.

Television and newspapers were the preferred media for news and current events among respondents. This indicates that the news function of traditional media remains prominent and unchallenged, at least for the time being.

Male respondents are found to use Internet more frequently than female respondents for playing games. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Gross, 2004). Most of the online games are action games and role play games containing violent contents. Violence and action dramas attract more boys than girls. This may explain why female respondents use the Internet less frequently than males for games. Females are also less likely to use the Internet for making friends than males. It may be because the female respondents are afraid of meeting “bad” people on the Internet. Newspapers have reported cases of girls being raped by online friends. It creates an impression that the Internet is not a safe platform for building social connection.

Female respondents used the Internet more frequently for helping with homework and getting information about further education than male respondents. It may suggest that girls are more concern about scholarly pursuits. It was found that boys in the middle school were more likely to be ridiculed for working hard. Some boys thought that working hard was not a cool and masculine action while it was more acceptable for girls to work hard (Warrington et al., 2000). Female young people also showed more interest in fashion and travel on the Internet than male young people. Advertisers of these product categories should therefore create more female-friendly websites to cater for their information needs.

When analyzed by age group, those aged 20 to 24 more frequently used the Internet for searching information about travel, further education, health and shopping than those aged 15 to 19. Sixty-seven out of 70 respondents who had a part-time or full-time job are aged 20 to 24. Respondents aged 20 to 24 in general have more money to spend and therefore pay more attention to shopping information. Respondents aged 15 to 19 used the Internet more frequently for making friends than those aged 20 to 24. This may suggest that those aged 15 to 19 have a limited social network and are interested in making new friends through the Internet platform.

This research shows that the Internet was most frequently used by the respondents for music and entertainment. Pastore (2000) cited that the reasons for the adolescent to download music from the Internet are convenience, availability of hard-to-find works, and free music. Obviously, young people in Hong Kong look for fun and enjoyment on the Internet. Advertisers should take advantage of it and add entertainment value to their websites and online advertisements. Moreover, advertisers may cooperate with music studios to produce pop songs for their brands. Marketers aiming at young consumers should definitely put their promotional materials online and facilitate the access by their target audience. For example, advertisers can convert the jingles to downloadable mp3 and ring tones. In this way, the top of mind brand audiences will be increased.

Most of the respondents locate websites using search engines. Although many marketers include the web addresses on their television commercials, print advertisements and billboards, the current study indicates that this is not enough. Marketers should work with the major search engines and maximize the exposure of their web addresses in the search engines. Creating word-of-mouth is another way of promoting websites. Advertisers should create discussion forums on the topic or encourage young people to talk about their advertisements on the websites. Marketers can also actively promote their websites to young opinion leaders in order to trigger a viral effect.

The “Bus Uncle” incident in Hong Kong in April 2006 demonstrates the enormous

power of web communication. A enraged middle-aged man yelled, with a stream of abuse, at a young man for six minutes on a bus. A teenage boy near by recorded the incident with his mobile phone and uploaded the video clip to YouTube.com. The video clip soon spread over the online community. By May 2006, the video clip and its incarnations, including the Karaoke version and the rap remix, attracted nearly three million people. With the powerful viral effect among web users, the “Bus Uncle” incident moved from a dispute between two passengers on a bus ride to a front page news article in Hong Kong, and a news story on the international news (Fowler, 2006). Marketers can make use of the viral effect on the Internet to promote their websites as well as their products or services.

The Internet was found to be the most popular channel to search for sensitive information among young people, followed by friends in this study. This finding is important for social marketing practitioners trying to convey messages to young people regarding sensitive issues such as sex education, drink driving, AIDS and consumer complaints. The findings indicate that the Internet is more important than personal sources in providing young people with information about sensitive issues. The Internet stands out because of its nature. With the vast pool of online resources, people can find out almost everything on the Internet. Furthermore, most of the time, people can do things anonymously on the Internet. No one knows who you are unless you decide to disclose yourself. This can help avoid troubles and embarrassment. Young people can look for something sensitive online freely with their confidentiality and privacy protected. Parents and teachers were least preferred sources of information about sensitive issues. This may be because of their perceived distance from the young people. Sometimes parents and teachers are unwilling to open up or too soon to make judgment. As young people are less willing to consult parents and teachers on sensitive issues, social marketers should adopt peer images in advising young people on the Internet.

Social service organizations should make good use of the Internet to communicate positive and healthy messages to young persons. The Internet can serve as a platform to allow young people to seek professional assistance from social service organizations. In other words, websites of social service organizations targeting young people should be more interactive and encourage two-way communication.

5. CONCLUSION

This study presents the current state of young people’s media use and provides a baseline against measurement of changes in the future. The current study found that the internet plays a prominent role among young people in hong kong. a majority of people aged 15 to 24 surveyed in this study spent one to three hours in the internet.

The main reasons for Internet usage was for music and for fun. The Internet was the preferred media choice for information driven activities. Traditional media retained importance for entertainment and shopping activities. Television was preferred among young people for news and current affairs. Most of the respondents found useful websites through search engines. Interpersonal information sources gave way to the Internet for obtaining information about sensitive issues among young people.

The 21st century is a digital age and we expect that the importance of the Internet will continue to grow. Advertisers should face this challenge. They should take a more active role in building their online communication platform to meet the needs and desires of the young people they have targeted.

6. LIMITATIONS

The sample was a convenience sample and it contained a higher proportion of respondents aged 20 to 24 than those aged 15 to 19. We did not collect information about topics young people considered as sensitive issues. As a result, the findings are exploratory in nature. Further study using a probability sample is needed to generalize the results to the youth population in Hong Kong.

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