

Do More People Use Social Media for Personal or for Mass Communication?



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Social media is, at its core, a source of communication. That communication can be one of many kinds, such as friends, with direct messaging, with groups of people, with tweets on twitter, or as part of an audience, when watching a youtuber. This represents the difference between personal and mass communication. Personal communication, or interpersonal communication, is described as “communication that is primarily based on the face-to-face dynamics of two people” (Humphreys, 2016, pg 8) In other words, it is communication directly between you and people you have met before. Mass communication, on the other hand, is “how organizations communicate to a large, diffuse, and heterogeneous audience.” (Humphreys, 2016, pg 9) This means mass communication is more directed to general audiences, or unknown people. Social media has become easily equipped to handle both personal and mass communication techniques, but that does not mean that both are used at a similar level.

The goal of this study is to understand how social media is used, specifically what level personal and mass communication methods are used. Studies in the past have established the use of social media as a frequent occurrence, such as with a study done by Camille Le Gall, Isabelle Le Gall, and Alireza Jalali (2020) on college students during exams season. In this study they found that “About 84.8% of the participants used social media” (pg 49) and that platforms such as YouTube and Facebook were used daily, even during the stressful time of exam season. Due to this being established the next step is to learn how much is personal communication, and how much is mass communication. This has been researched before, and in a study by Kenichi Ishii (2006) it was found that over half of the research group used email in order to contact people. (pg 353) This shows that people have a tendency to one on one communication, or personal

communication. Because of this, the hypothesis going into this research is that social media will be used for personal communication more often than mass communication.

Method

This study used Google Survey in order to collect data about individuals. Surveys were sent out and shared, and they included questions about the relationship between users and the content they view on social media. Focusing on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit, Pinterest, and Twitter the survey asked participants who used each of these platforms the amount of people they had met face to face that they communicated with on that platform compared to the amount of people that they interacted with in total on that platform. The study surveyed 22 youth, 18 years old and younger, and reached a majority of male participants, with 68.2% of applicants identifying as male and 31.8% of applicants applying as female. The survey had 2 demographic questions, and anywhere from 8-16 survey questions, depending on whether or not they used certain types of media.

Results

After tallying up results, it seems that more people use social media for mass communication as compared to personal communication. The survey results show 47 answers of only knowing a few or none of the people on a specific social media platform which is greater than the 34 answers of knowing most or all the people they communicate with on a specific social media platform.

This data is slightly skewed however, and when looking for trends a few large ones become apparent. The most popular social media site was YouTube, which is used by all 22 participants. This site had a heavy trend of knowing only a few or no people personally, with 0 answers for knowing some, most, or all of the people they interact with on YouTube. This is

mainly because there is no way to message for this site with people you know and is based off of the concept of mass communication. The same things go for TikTok and Reddit, where no participants who said they used these platforms also said they know most or all of the people they interact with using the site or app. TikTok users had 90% of participants say they knew no one they interacted with on TikTok, while Reddit users said that all 100% did not know the other people that interacted with on Reddit. The platforms that had more options for both mass and personal communications, in contrast, had a trend to be more personal, with Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram all having results with most of the participants knowing most of the people on those platforms. Facebook had 85.7% of respondents know most or all the people they interacted with on Facebook, Snapchat had slightly less with 73.7% using personal communications, and Instagram had 63.2% of people who used Instagram for personal communication.

Discussion

While this study did show that more social media is used for mass communication rather than personal communication, it did also show that when given more choice, people choose personal communication over mass communication. This does mean the hypothesis given at the beginning has been proven incorrect however, as more social media is used for mass communication than personal communication. This also gives us insight into how most social media is made with mass communication in mind, forcing people to choose that over personal communication.

This study did have limitations, however. The biggest limitation was the small sample size, with only 22 people used for data. In the future, if this study were to be repeated, the biggest change would be to get more people to take the survey to collect more data. This would also help with the gender imbalance and lack of age diversity. The other big change that should

be made would be to separate out the social media designed for mass communication or personal communication from the platforms that offer both, which would allow for more accurate data on people's choices on types of communication used.

References

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