

OPINION

SOCIAL MEDIA



DR
SABARIAH
MOHAMED
SALLEH

EQUIP YOUNG WITH SKILLS TO KNOW FACT FROM FICTION

Globalisation has changed the pattern of interaction and communication, especially among youth

RECENTLY, my husband generously gave my 12-year-old son a smartphone. I was not in favour of the decision, but, I cannot help but agree with the sole reason he is giving Dani the privilege – in case of an emergency.

As a media and communications scholar, I duly acknowledge that young people live in a world that is continuously being shaped by media and technology. Owning a device, even at a young age, is inevitable, and, at times, necessary.

However, as a mother, I worry. What websites would he try to access? Whose account will he follow on Instagram? What does he talk about with his friends on WhatsApp? What pictures are he sharing on his social media accounts?

As much as I try to limit his online interaction, I know that it will not be easy for me to control and manage the flow of information and constantly be his gatekeeper. In addition, I also worry about his safety because the ease of access to information has produced many “online detectives” who have mastered the art of stalking and online lurking.

Globalisation and the rapid pace of today’s technology have changed the pattern of interaction and communication, especially among youth, who are eager to “socialise”.

If, formerly, interaction and social relationship occur face to face, now they have revolutionised and shifted online, thanks to advanced technology.

A lot of personal information is casually shared online. In addi-



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tion, the practice of producing and sharing photos has become a form of self-expression and recognition. It means the youth belongs to a group in the global media culture of teenagers.

The existence of new technology has indeed helped to meet one of their basic needs – social acceptance. It has, in my opinion, slowly emerged as a new popular culture. Having an Instagram account for a teenager is almost compulsory because this is the platform which allows them to see and be seen.

In a recent study I conducted, in which image sharing practices among young people on social media were examined, it was found that young people shared a lot of highly stylised pictures on Instagram which they said would help them attain a certain social status and acceptance.

Most are posed and meticulously chosen pictures which show the best side of their lives, such as the luxurious restaurants they had dinner at, meeting a celebrity, being at an exclusive

event or vacationing at popular tourist spots.

Their image-sharing practices on social media, I deduced, was influenced by their target audience, or basically people who have access to their account. Young people carefully select appropriate images or photos to be displayed on social media, based on who has access to the account.

They choose to reveal different parts of their identities to different sets of people.

For instance, pictures shared on Facebook are those related to festivities and important events with family members because close family members like parents, uncles, aunts and siblings are usually followers or friends who have access to these pictures.

WhatsApp, meanwhile, was found to be the most intimate platform – an avenue for respondents to share private and personal photographs, some of which will not be published on Instagram or Facebook.

In my opinion, our highly collectivistic culture and the need to conform to society’s expectation have increased the complexity of self-representation on social media networks and the construction of identity.

The need to look good and be perceived positively has made social media a dramatised platform, which does not necessarily depict reality. My concern lies in the fact that information obtained from the world wide web has, in one way or another, helped young people make decisions and form perceptions.

Thus, it is pivotal that young people are equipped with the skills which can help them differentiate fact from fiction. I also believe that as a parent, we should be concerned and observe our children’s online activities to ensure their safety.

sabariah@ukm.edu.my

The writer is an academician at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia who specialises in young people and media.

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