

# Teenagers and Social Media: The Effect of Personality, Brand Loyalty and Peer Group Pressure

\*Vlachopoulou, E., Boutsouki, C., Chatzithomas, L.

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, School of Economics, Department of Business Administration

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: ellivlahop@yahoo.gr

**Abstract: Purpose** – The advent of Social Media has changed the way teenagers communicate with each other. Teenagers enjoy sharing their personal details, interests and hobbies, which helps marketers to build more personalized and targeted campaigns. The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between the personal characteristics of a teenager, such as personality, brand loyalty and peer group pressure and his Social Media usage. **Design/methodology/approach** – A convenience sample of 218 Greek students (12-14 years old) was recruited to participate in the study. Students who are profile owners to at least one of the two Social Networking Sites, Facebook or Google+, were asked to complete an online questionnaire, which included questions regarding their social media usage, their personality's characteristics, and the level of their brand loyalty and peer group pressure. **Findings** – Facebook usage is high among Greek teenagers as almost everybody, 94%, has a profile on Facebook. The main reason for Social Media usage is communication with peers. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between Facebook usage and teenager's personality, brand loyalty and peer group pressure. **Originality/value** – Previous research has explored the Facebook usage among college students and adults. This study seeks to examine the Facebook level of use among teenagers.

**Keywords:** Social Networking Sites, teenagers, personality, brand loyalty, peer group pressure

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the way people communicate with each other, but also the way companies communicate with their customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Users can develop their personal online network (Lin & Lu, 2011) by developing relationships with others (Correa et al., 2010). This interaction with their networks empowers customers' control of dissemination of information and communication. Consumers do not only share information but they produce it in the way they desire (Thackeray et al., 2008).

By providing simple, familiar and comfortable environments, social media encourages users to take their existing 'real world' to a virtual world (Keenan & Shiri, 2009) and share their profiles, interests, hobbies, photos, videos, and their opinions with their friends or with communities of common interests (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lin & Lu, 2011; Ellison et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2008). Through these activities users spend a significant portion of their time on navigating to their friends' profiles, resulting in high sociability and social interaction between them (Keenan & Shiri, 2009). As a result, community building is being reinforced, where consumers who share common interests tend to gather to small groups, the well-known 'fan pages' in Facebook, informing each other about their opinions and the latest news.

Mangold & Faulds (2009) mentioned the fact that users can talk to each other, which is an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication, differing on that 'instead of telling a few friends, users now have the ability to tell hundreds or thousands of other people with a few keystrokes.' (p. 359).

This speed of the information through consumer-to-consumer conversations is shaping to a great extent the current marketplace (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social Networking Sites (SNSs) represent a valuable marketing communications channel (Fraser & Dutta, 2009). Companies in order to sustain to the changing marketplace need to be aware of the key SNSs and analyze how they work, what types of people use them, and how people interact with them.

Previous research has explored the Facebook usage among college students and adults (Correa et al., 2010, Ellison et al., 2007). This study seeks to examine the Facebook level of use among teenagers. Moreover, it aims to investigate the relationship between Facebook media usage and the inner characteristics of a teenager such as personality, brand loyalty and peer group pressure.

## 2. SOCIAL MEDIA & TEENAGERS

The intense sociability and social interaction through Social media is reflected by the number of users that the two major SNSs currently have; Facebook counts for more than 800 million users and Google+ for more than 40 million users. Both Facebook and Google+, though slightly differing, give the users the ability to state their demographics, interests, cultural

tastes, upload photos & videos, find their offline friends but also make new ones, and share their opinions and feelings (Lewis et al., 2008; Facebook, 2011, Google 2011).

With millions of people having profiles on SNSs, it challenges researchers to examine what types of people use them and if and how their personal characteristics influence the way they interact with them.

According to a study by Lenhart (2009), the 80% of American teenagers use Social Media, with boys being more likely to use SNSs. At the same time, SNS adoption among American adults is 64%, meaning that the teenagers' group is more attractive to companies.

Being the 'early adopters' of new technologies, teenagers tend to be trendsetters as they enjoy buying trendy brands, brands that their friends, or people of their generation use, but at the same time struggle to form an identity, portraying an ideal image (Dunne et al., 2010) and lacking self-confidence comparing to adults. According to modeling behavior, individuals, and more specifically teenagers, develop behavior and attitude by following the behavior of 'role' models. Peer group pressure, parents, school and media have been identified as the main sources of influence on teenager's consumption learning process. Teenagers feel that in the online environment they can develop personal relationships and learn more things (Veloutsou & McAlonan, 2012).

Being future adults and shaping the market's growth, teenagers' group seems to be the most valuable for companies. The current research paper will examine the way Greek teenagers interact with the SNSs and the effect of their personality, brand loyalty and peer group pressure on social media usage.

### **2.1 Personality and social media usage**

According to a study by Dunne et al. (2010) who used the Uses and Gratifications theory, teenagers are engaged in SNSs in order to create an identity and experiment with it. They believe that through owning a SNS profile they can portray and manage an ideal self, and be sheltered from any kind of embarrassment and rejection (Dunne et al., 2010).

Earlier studies (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2002) have shown that people who were more extraverted and less neurotic seemed to use less the Internet. But more recent ones have shown that the more extraverted the heavier Internet and SNSs users are (Ellison et al., 2007). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**Hypothesis 1:** Teenagers who are extraverted and enthusiastic use Facebook at a higher level.

### **2.2 Brand loyalty and social media usage**

Teenagers SNS profiles provide marketers with valuable information regarding their interests, lifestyles, social interactions with other people but also with brands (Dunne et al., 2010). They develop strong relationships with preferred brands (Sahay & Sharma, 2010). According to the previous study, Bebo SNS facilitates personal endorsement of particular brands, which can boost the electronic word of mouth (eWOM) either positively or negatively. According to Harris & Rae (2009), there are websites that encourage users to review services they have experienced for the benefit of other users, which is far trustworthy than traditional promotional materials that have been produced by the company itself. Consumers provide the information, creating word-of-mouth communication about the company. This eWOM communication tool could be more noticeable among teenagers due to their high brand endorsement and high desire for peer acceptance. Thus, the following hypothesis is being proposed:

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a positive relationship between Facebook level of usage and teenager's brand loyalty.

### **2.3 Peer group pressure and social media usage**

Teenagers have always been worried about the presentation of self towards their friends. They enjoy communicating with them, something that is being empowered by SNSs as through them they create an online, and sometimes an ideal identity, they expose their lifestyles and their social relations in order to express themselves, get socialized, engage with other groups and communities and be creative by posting their own opinions and beliefs (Livingstone, 2008). They want to be older than they are, have fun and change the world. They enjoy being 'cool kids' by being the first to buy and show off their gadgets (Dunne et al., 2010). According to Lenhart et al. (2011), 64% of the 80% of teenagers who use social media goes online daily, which can be interpreted as getting in touch with friends on daily basis.

Thus, the following hypothesis is being proposed:

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a positive relationship between user's peer group pressure and Facebook level of use.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Sample and procedure**

In order to examine the usage of social media as well as the effect of personality, brand loyalty and peer group pressure, an online survey was conducted in November 2011. A convenience sample of 218 Greek teenagers (12-14 years old) from a private school was recruited to participate in the study. Students who are profile owners to at least one of the two big Social Networking Sites under study completed an online questionnaire during their IT class. They were asked to answer questions regarding their social media level of use, and the level of their brand loyalty and peer group pressure. The Facebook media intensity (Ellison et al., 2007), personality (Gosling, et al., 2003) brand loyalty (Sen, et al., 2001) and peer group pressure

(Park & Lessig, 1977) marketing scales were used to construct the questions. Due to the popularity of Facebook and Google+ worldwide and their increasing impact on the marketplace, the current paper will examine their popularity and level of use among Greek teenagers. Even though Google+ is quite new to the Greek market, it seems to be very promising in the near future and it worth to measure its growth.

## 4.2 Measures

### *Social media usage*

Social media usage was measured by the Facebook media intensity scale (Ellison et al., 2007) (Cronbach's alpha = .775) in order to examine the level of Facebook usage. This measure includes Likert-scale questions in order to measure the emotional connection of teenagers with Facebook and the extent to which Facebook has been integrated into their daily lives (responses categories ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Also, self-reported assessments are included to record Facebook behavior, such as the number of Facebook friends and the average daily time spent on Facebook (see Table 1).

### *Personality*

The personality characteristics of teenagers were measured using the Five Item personality scale (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003). This construct is composed of 5 items (extraverted-enthusiastic, agreeable, organized, emotionally stable, open to experience), each measured along 5-point Likert-scale regarding teenager's personality characteristics (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree). This scale was then related to the Facebook media usage and showed that the more enthusiastic and extraverted the teenager is, the heavier Facebook user he is ( $p=.000$ ).

### *Brand loyalty*

The level of brand loyalty among teenagers was measured by a 3-item brand loyalty scale (Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz, 2001). Using a 5-point scale, teenagers were asked their level of agreement ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree with each of the following statements: 'I like brands', 'When I buy a product, I buy a brand' and 'When I buy a product, I am loyal to it'. The results of the brand loyalty level were then related to the Facebook usage in order to examine if there is a positive relationship between the brand loyalty level of teenagers with their level of Facebook usage ( $p=.000$ ).

### *Peer group pressure*

Peer group pressure among teenagers was measured using Park and Lessig Reference Group scale (1977). This scale is composed of 14 statements each measured along 5-point scales regarding teenager's behavior (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree). According to the reference group scale, the reference group influence has three motivational components: informational, utilitarian and value expressive.

Peer group pressure was then related to Facebook usage in order to examine the potential existence and nature of relationship between the two variables ( $p=.000$ ).

## 5. FINDINGS - DISCUSSION

Overall, 218 Greek teenagers in a private school participated in the study (45% girls, 55% boys). Almost everybody (94%) has a Facebook profile opposed to 6% that has a Google+ profile, which was expected as Google + is not very popular in Greece yet. Also, girls tend to use Facebook more than boys. Thirty-five percent of the respondents has more than 400 friends on Facebook and 20% spends more than 80 minutes on Facebook weekly (Table 1). It seems that Facebook level of use is very high among Greek teenagers (12-14 years old).

**Table 1 Descriptive statistics for Facebook intensity**

Items and Scale (N = 209)	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Facebook Intensity (Cronbach's alpha = .775)</i>		
Facebook is part of my everyday activity	2.98	1.288
I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook	2.23	1.145
I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while	2.24	1.274
Facebook has become part of my daily routine	2.87	1.282
I would be sorry if Facebook shut down	2.78	1.515
About how many total Facebook friends do you have at Facebook? 0 = 10 or less, 1 = 11-50, 2 = 51-100, 3 = 101-150, 4 = 151-200, 5 = 201-250, 6 = 251-300, 7 = 301-400, 8 = more than 400	5.50	2.472
In the past week, on average, approximately how many minutes per day have you spent on Facebook? 0 = 0-14 minutes, 1 = 15-29 minutes, 2 = 30-34 minutes, 3 = 35-49 minutes, 4 = 50-64 minutes, 5 = 65-79 minutes, 6 = more than 80 minutes	2.82	2.147

The main reason for Social media usage is communication with peers. According to Table 2, the three main reasons that lead teenagers to create a profile are to be in contact with their friends, chat with friends, and to follow their friends'

example. The fact that teenagers in their ‘offline’ life enjoy being with their friends, is also highlighted by their motives in having an SNS profile.

**Table 2 Main reasons for having an SNS profile**

N = 218	Percentage (%)
Chat with my friends	83,0
Be in touch with my friends	87,2
Meet new friends	20,6
My friends already have	33,9
It's in fashion	13,8
It's cool	18,3

Three of teenagers’ main activities on social media are ‘liking’ photos, videos and everything they find interesting, commenting to a friends’ message and checking their friends’ photos and videos.

**Table 3 Main activities in SNSs**

N = 218	Percentage (%)
Update my profile	30,7
Post photos or videos	35,3
<b>Comment on a friend's wall</b>	<b>51,8</b>
Send messages to my friends	39,4
Tag my friends on photos or posts or videos	26,6
<b>See my friends' photos or videos</b>	<b>49,5</b>
See my friends' posts	26,6
Play games	33,9
Post links of anything I like	19,3
<b>'Like' photos or videos or anything else I like</b>	<b>55,0</b>
Meet new friends	23,4
Create groups or fan pages or events	12,8
Express my opinion or feelings	20,6

According to the findings, a teenager who is more enthusiastic and extraverted tend to be more sociable by ‘transferring’ his broad offline social network to his online domain, interact with it, inform it about his lifestyle, interests and broaden it even more. Thus the first hypothesis is supported ( $p = .000$ ).

Teenagers who tend to develop strong relationships with their preferred brands express their interest and passion about them by following brands’ online profiles. They enjoy being up-to-dated with the latest brand innovation and news and being part of brand’s community. As a result, teenagers who are loyal to a specific brand tend to use Facebook more. This signifies that the second hypothesis is supported ( $p = .00$ ).

The third hypothesis, teenagers that are influenced by their family, friends, and school tend to use Facebook at a higher level, was also supported ( $p = .000$ ). This can also be verified by the number of teenagers that own a Facebook profile because their friends have already one (34%) (Table 2). They worry about their personal image and their peer acceptance, as they tend to be very vulnerable to what their friends say and what their friends do. They need their friends’ recognition more than the one of their parents.

Also, according to the results of Table 4, there is a difference in the Social Media level of usage by gender. Girls tend to use Facebook more than boys do.

**Table 4 Group Statistics**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Intensity	Girl	95	2,7853	,88257	,09055
	Boy	109	2,4716	,98414	,09426

This was also supported by the Independent Samples t-test ( $p = .018$ ) which indicated that there is a difference in the Facebook intensity between the two groups.

Overall, this paper provides an insight of the SNSs level of usage among the group of teenagers, which has not been investigated in previous studies. In particular, it looks on how their personal characteristics (personality, brand loyalty and peer group pressure) impact on SNS level of usage. Greek teenagers (12-14 years old) seem to use Facebook to a

Table 5 Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Intensity	Equal variances assumed	,596	,441	2,382	202	,018	,31370	,13169	,05404	,57337
	Equal variances not assumed			2,400	201,828	,017	,31370	,13071	,05597	,57143

high extent as almost everybody, 94%, has a Facebook profile. Teenagers feel that through Facebook they can stay in touch with their friends by 'liking' photos and videos, commenting to a friends' post, and checking their friends' photos and videos. This can also explain the positive relationship between the Facebook usage and the peer group pressure level, as teenagers worry about their peer acceptance and need their friends' recognition. Also, the more extraverted and enthusiastic they are, the more sociable and heavy users of Facebook they become. Teenagers who tend to express their feelings and interests towards friends, facts and brands seem to use Facebook more.

## 6. LIMITATION – FURTHER RESEARCH

In conclusion, this study has focused on the exploration of teenagers' use of Social media, which has been relatively neglected in previous studies.

Further investigation of the attitude of teenagers towards the SNSs will help marketers to understand better teenagers' needs and concerns and will lead to more targeted and personalized campaigns. Research needs to continue though in investigating the real return on investment of social media usage; do they increase product's sales or do they just help in maintaining good customer relationships? Also, researchers can shed more light on the teenagers' use of social media through a very intrusive tool, the mobile phone.

Finally, this study is not without limitations as it uses a convenience sample from a private school. Further research might consider public schools too, in order to explore if and what are the differences between them.

## References

- Hamburger, A. Y., and Vinitzky, G. (2002), "Social network use and personality", *Computers in Human Behaviour*, Vol. 26, pp. 1289-1295.
- Correa, T., Hinsley, W. H., Zunica, (2010), "Who interacts on the Web?: The intersection of users' personality and social media use", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 26, pp. 247-253.
- Dunne, A. Lawlor, M.A., & Rowley, J. (2010), "Young people's use of online social networking sites – a uses and gratifications perspective", *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 46-58.
- Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007), "The Benefits of Facebook 'Friends': Social Capital and College Students' Use of Online Social Network Sites", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 12, pp.1143-1168.
- Ellison, N., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2010), "Connection strategies: social capital implications of Facebook-enabled communication practices", *New media & society*, Vol. 10, No. 5, pp. 1-20.
- Facebook (2012), available at: <http://www.facebook.com> (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012).
- Fraser, M. and Dutta, S. (2008), "Throwing Sheep in the Boardroom: How Online Social Networking Will Transform your life, work and world", Wiley, Chichester.
- Google (2012), available at: <http://www.google.com> (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2012).
- Gosling, S. D., Rentfrow, P.J., & Swann, W. B. J. (2003), "A very brief measure of the big five personality domains", *Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol. 37, pp. 504-528.
- Harris, L. & Rae, A. (2009), "Social networks: the future of marketing for small business", *Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 30, No. 5, pp. 24-31.
- Kaplan, A. M. Haenlein, M. (2010), "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 53, pp. 59-68.
- Keenan, A., & Shiri, A. (2009), "Sociability and social interaction on social networking websites", *Library review*, Vol. 58, No. 6, pp. 438-450.
- Lenhart, A. (2009), "Teens and Social Media", available at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2009/17-Teens-and-Social-Media-An-Overview.aspx> (accessed 10th December 2011).

- Lewis, K. Kaufman, J., Gonzalez, M., Wimmer, A., Christakis, N. (2008), "Tastes, ties, and time: A new social network dataset using Facebook.com", *Social Networks*, Vol. 30, pp. 330-342.
- Lin, K., and Lu, H. (2011), "Why people use social networking sites: An empirical study integrating network externalities and motivation theory", *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 27, pp. 1152-1161.
- Livingstone, S. (2008), "Taking risky opportunities in youthful content creation: teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy and self-expression", *New media & Society*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 393-411.
- Mangold, W. G. & Faulds, J. W. (2009), "Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 52, pp. 357-365.
- Park, C.W. and Lessig, P.V. (1977), "Students and housewives: differences in susceptibility to reference group influence", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp.102-110.
- Sahay, A. and Shama, V. (2010), "Brand relationships and switching behaviour for highly used products in young consumers", *VIKALPA*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp. 15-30.
- Sen, S., Gurhan-Canli, Z., Morwitz, V. (2001), "Withholding Consumption: A social dilemma erspective on consumer boycotts", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 28, pp.399-417.
- Steinfeld, C., Ellison, N., & Lampe, C. (2008), "Social capital, self-esteem, and use of online social network sites: A longitudinal analysis", *Journal of Applied Development Psychology*, Vol. 29, pp. 434-445.
- Thackeray, R. Neiger, B. L. Hanson, C.L. McKenzie, J.F. (2008), "Enhancing Promotional Strategies within Social Marketing Programs: Use of Web 2.0 Social Media", *Health Promotion Practice*, Vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 338-343.
- Veloutsou, C. & McAlonan, A. (2012), " Loyalty and or disloyalty to a search engine: the case of young Millennials", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 125-135.