

The Influence of Advertisement on Media Users: Empirical Evidence from Three Generational Differences in Malaysia

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Abstract

This research was conducted in order to investigate the effect of users' preferences on media contents and channels toward the sustainability of mass media as a business model. The aim of the study is to find out whether or not users prefer to access information via the Internet; to examine whether users prefer to use traditional, new, or social media; and to determine the relative influence of advertisement on traditional, new, or social media. This study is based on the primary data that were gathered from questionnaires distributed to 109 people in Klang Valley, Malaysia, which consist of three generations: Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. The study showed that the majority of people still prefer to use traditional media channels. It also was found that advertisements in traditional media highly influence Gen X but not other generations. However, advertisements in new media influence all generations. In terms of obtaining information, Gen X prefers to obtain information from traditional media, while Gen Y and Gen Z prefer to obtain information from social media. All generations have similar behavior in which they are inclined to spend most of their time using social media compared with other forms of media.

Keywords: Advertisement, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, Social media.

Introduction

Mass media refers to diversified media technologies that are used to capture the attention of audiences using mass communication. There are many types of mass communication devices other than radio and newspaper. The advance of technology over time contributes to the rise of new types of communication.

According to Ojarvi and Valtonen (2012), traditional mass media consists of newspaper, radio, and television. New mass media is a different form of media. An example to new mass media is the Internet. The newspaper industry, particularly in Western countries and the

United States specifically, has lost its bite to the Internet. The circumstances became worst after users stopped their newspaper subscriptions. This is due to current economic constraints that made many business firms cut their spending by the way of stopping unnecessary large amounts of newspaper subscriptions. This has caused many newspaper companies to face shutdown, bankruptcy, employment termination, and compensation cuts (Salman et al. 2011)

The other reason for this collapse is due to lower newspaper revenue from advertising. Generally, the main source of income for mass media comes from advertisements. Advertisers will put their advertisements in various media outlets. Mass media will later spread and promote these advertisements (Rinallo and Basuroy 2009). Between 1936 and 1992, there was a decline of more than 65% of newspaper's revenue from advertising (King et al. 1997).

In addition to that, since the Internet was introduced in mid-1990s, the number of newspaper readerships has steadily fallen (Gentzkow 2014). In the era of Internet and technology, traditional mass media such as newspapers and magazines are no longer the sole sources of information to users. Users have other sources of information, which can be obtained from the Internet. Nowadays, most people obtain information from the Internet, while television has become the second choice for this purpose (Hong 2012).

Besides, newspaper readership is also declining among younger generations, as they now obtain information via social media and online news. This makes advertisers follow customers to online space and gradually leave offline channels (Kerrigan and Graham 2012). This means advertisers reduce their advertising expenditure in traditional mass media (Zentner 2012) and turn to the new stream of channels.

As readers have moved from printed media to online news, advertisers also have transferred a greater amount of their advertising expenditure into online advertising, step by step moving their regard for online or non-news channels. The web channel has taken a critical extent of classified advertising far from local news media associations. Likewise, the impact of worldwide news aggregators such as Google News, amalgamates stories from the web and presents them through an advantageous client interface. This is another additional adversary against newspapers (Kim and Cheon 2009).

Based on this development, it is interesting to further investigate these issues by examining the response and preferences on the different type of mass media by various groups of users, specifically Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. Prior studies show that marketers have different ways in approaching Gen X and Gen Y, especially in regard to electronic mediated marketing. Strutton et al. (2011), for example, found that Gen Y more heavily engaged with social networking, but Gen Y proved more reliant with email. Gen Y also has high spending power, believes in amusement, has high aspirations and desires, and enjoys creative, engaging, and customized messages via mobile phones (Jain and Pant 2012). In addition, Gen Y is more willing to embrace SMS campaigns from the brands they use and admire (Chhateja and Vain 2014).

Thus, the study intends to find out whether different generations of people have different ways to access information via the Internet, different likings for using traditional media, new media or social media, and to determine the relative influence of advertisement on traditional media, new media, or social media. In relation to these purposes, these research questions need to be answered:

“Do users like to access information via the Internet or not?”

“Do users like to use traditional, new, or social media?”

“What is the influence of advertisement on the traditional, new or social media?”

The scope of this study is focused on the preference of mass media by the users. This study is significant because, currently, traditional mass media is experiencing loss of business to new mass media. Newspaper and magazine companies around the world now ceased their operation due to decreases in the number of copies sold. When this number declined, advertisers no longer preferred to use traditional mass media for advertisements because it is not an effective marketing tool.

This study makes several contributions. First, this study seeks to identify factors that influence sustainability of mass media companies. Therefore, it would help companies to continue their operation and avoid bankruptcy. Second, this study focuses on three different groups of people, with various lifestyles and preferences. Thus, practically, the outcome of the study can be used by relevant organizations to re-strategize their business advertising by using a correct approach to sell their products to the targeted customer segment. Finally, it will contribute to the theoretical framework and current literature on the media preferences by the different groups of people, namely, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z, which are currently scarce in the literature, especially in the context of developing countries such as Malaysia.

Literature Review

Gen X, Y, and Z

Gen X is the generation born between 1960s to 1980s and came after Baby Boomers. Gen X is the first generation to grow up in the Internet era, and it is perhaps the most extensively wired (Miller 2011). The values most important for this generation are a sense of belonging, teamwork, ability to learn new things, autonomy and entrepreneurship (Ramo 1997), security, flexibility, feedback, and short-term rewards (Tulgan 1995; Hornblower 1997). Tulgan (1995) suggests that, to inspire motivation among Gen X, managers need to reward innovation, make public displays of success, support personal growth, create opportunities for satisfying teamwork and personal responsibility, help subordinates achieve visibility in the organization, and create a culture of fun (Jurkiewicz 2000).

As compared with Gen X and Gen Z, Gen Y gets most attention and is the most widely researched in academic literature. Gen Y is also known as the Net Generation and Millennials. This generation is typically informative and media savvy, has a strong work ethic, good entrepreneurial spirit, and sense of responsibility, appreciate change, and is more transparent and tolerant, with increased self-confidence and optimism (Jorgensen 2003; Tulgan and Martin 2001; Viswanathan and Vain 2013).

Gen Z, also called the Net Generation and iGeneration, is the youngest generation whose members were born between 1995 and 2010. Those from Gen Z are generally optimistic, prefer to share their thoughts and experiences, are more realistic about their lives and futures, prefer to follow and consider their parents as important role models, are a lot more pragmatic and down to earth, and more cautious (Seemiller and Grace 2016), practical, and value-conscious (Rodriguez 2015). Seemiller and Grace (2016) suggest that, for effective Gen Z education, classrooms need to be renovated for more practical and applied learning, expand experiential learning, have a clearer relationship with learning outcomes to workforce values, and expand support for the creation of new inventions and businesses (Seemiller and Grace 2016).

Issues Concern of Business Entities

The newspaper industry has gradually lost its race and competition to the Internet and more advanced information and communication technology (ICT). Many uncontrollable circumstances such as economic slowdown and falls in profit generated by a company worsen the scenario. Many big corporations have stopped their newspaper membership as a way to cut down operating costs and prevent non-value added expenditure. This has severely impacted many newspaper companies (Salman et al. 2011). Therefore, mass media companies, particularly those practicing traditional mass media, have to find ways to regain their popularity to avoid business shutdown. Therefore, the companies need to focus on a certain field, such as applying more creativity and involvement in Internet-based advertisement in their product and studying the effects on users. This will help companies to identify which area will attract advertisers to advertise. Cost also plays an important role because this affects users' preference in choosing their source of information. For example, if users want to maintain low cost in obtaining information, they might choose Internet-related media instead of buying newspapers or magazines.

However, each individual has his or her own preferences. That person will choose which channel of information that best suits his or her needs. Mass media providers have to compete against each other in order to get the highest number of users. They often try to break down and focus on a specific group of people. For example, Same'e et al. (2014) found that, for Malaysian academicians, a majority of them use online newspaper to obtain information about international news. On the other hand, they also use Astro, the biggest paid television broadcast provider in Malaysia, to obtain information instead of using the Internet. Among all of the channels provided by Astro, the Bernama TV channel has 36% preference among academicians, 30% on Al Jazeera, and the rest are Western news channels. For information about business, health, and science, people are depending on the Internet as a main source of information (Riffe et al. 2008).

Research Methodology

The data of this study are collected via survey questionnaires that are personally handed out to targeted respondents. To ensure fair distribution, 50 questionnaires were distributed toward each group of respondents, i.e., Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z. Thus, 150 questionnaires were distributed in total. Due to limited time and financial constraint, the respondents chosen came from the Klang Valley area of Malaysia. Furthermore, Klang Valley is one of the highest populated areas in Malaysia, and it is occupied by people from various backgrounds and is easily reached.

The questionnaires distributed contain two sections. The first section asks respondents demographic profiles, while the second section contains three parts, which ask questions related to the objectives of this study. Part A examines respondents' choice either online or offline in reading newspapers, magazines, watching television, and listening to the radio. Part B determines the respondents' choices of media in seeking news, information, entertainment, and media where they spend most time. The final part investigates the influence of advertisements in various media on respondents' preferences.

Findings

Demographic Profiles

Table 1:

Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

Demographic	Gen X	Gen Y	Gen Z	TOTAL
Male	24	17	8	49
Female	9	25	26	60
Malay	29	42	28	99
Chinese	3	-	6	9
India	1	-	-	1
Working	31	18	-	49
Not working	2	3	-	5
Studying	-	21	34	55

Fifty questionnaires were distributed to each generation of Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z; thus, the total number of questionnaires distributed were 150. Out of the 150 questionnaires, only 109 people responded with the response rate of 73 percent. From the 109 questionnaires received, 33 were from Gen X, 42 were from Gen Y, and 34 were from Gen Z, making the specific response rate for each generation at 66 percent, 84 percent, and 68 percent, respectively.

In this research, the focus in selecting respondents is their age. Therefore, the gender, race, and occupation of the respondents are random. As a summary, based on Table 1, 24 males and nine females represent Gen X, 17 males and 25 females represent Gen Y, and eight males and 26 females represent Gen Z. The race of the respondents is mostly Malay; the rest are Chinese and Indian. Most people from Gen X are employed. For Gen Y, 18 are employed, 21 are students, while three are full-time housewives. For Gen Z, all respondents are students. In addition to that, half of the respondents from Gen Z are secondary; two students are aged 14 years old, while the other half is undergraduate students.

Respondents' Preferences to Use Traditional or Internet Related Media

Part A of the second section queries users' preferences on whether to use traditional or Internet-based media. There are four questions in this part. The focus is on which channel a user obtains information. The traditional media channel means that the information is coming from traditional sources, e.g., newspaper, magazine, television, and radio. The Internet-related channel, on the other hand, means information coming from the Internet. The respondents are allowed to tick more than one answer. This will help to realistically identify which channel is being used, as it is common sense that people will not use only one source of information.

Question 1 represents which channel is being used by respondents to read either a physical or online newspaper. Question 2 represents which channel is used to read either a physical or online magazine. Question 3 represents which channel is being used by respondents to watch television, either physical or mobile. Finally, Question 4 represents which channel is used by the respondents to listen to either physical or mobile radio.

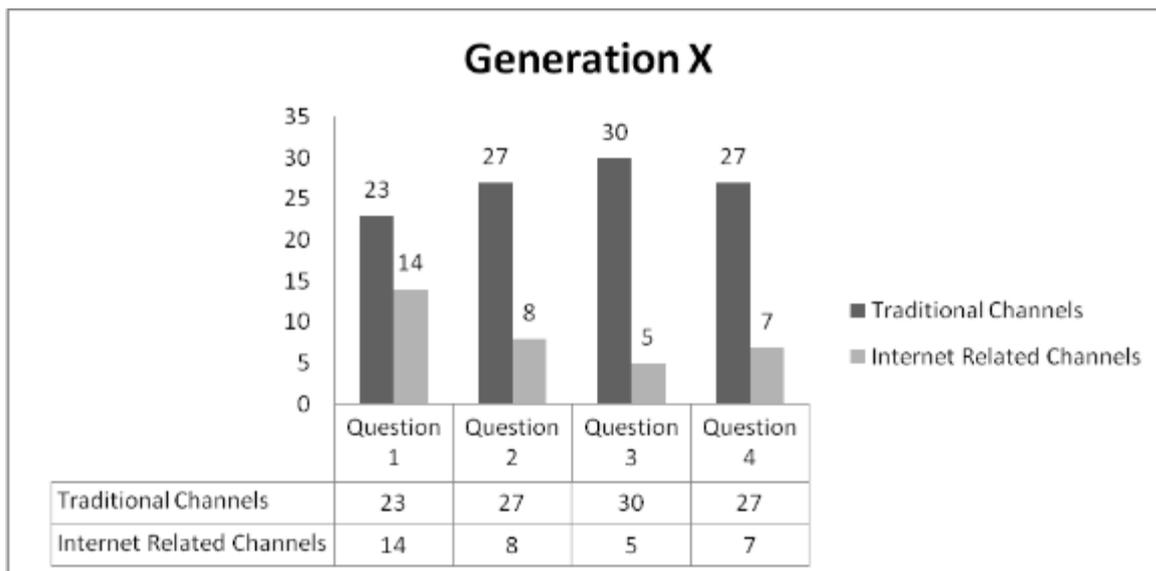


Figure 1: Channels Used by Gen X to Obtain Information

Figure 1 shows the channels used by Gen X to obtain information. The majority of respondents chose physical newspaper and magazine. They also prefer to watch physical television and listen to physical radio. It can be concluded that Gen X mainly chooses traditional media as a source of information compared with online media. Only a few of them chose Internet-related channels as a source of information. The possible reason for them to choose traditional media might be because they had used traditional media for a long time before the Internet only became a household name in Malaysia in the late twentieth century.

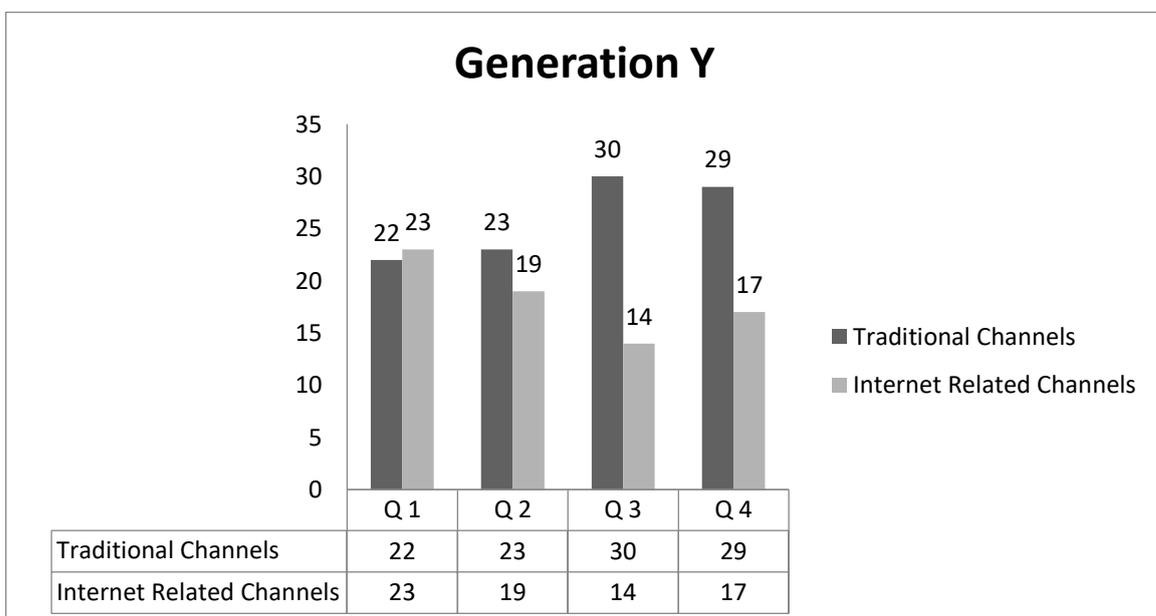


Figure 2: Channels Used by Gen Y to Obtain Information

Figure 2 shows the channels generally used by Gen Y to obtain information. A slightly higher number of respondents chose online newspaper. In contrast, a majority of respondents chose physical magazine. Similar to Gen X, the majority of the respondents chose

physical television instead of mobile television and listened to hear from physical radio instead of Internet-based radio. Based on this result, it can be concluded that Gen Y chose traditional media as a source of information compared with online media except for newspaper. However, the difference between preferences of online and offline newspapers in this generation is slim or one respondent to be exact. Therefore, it can be concluded that Gen Y uses online and offline channels to obtain information.

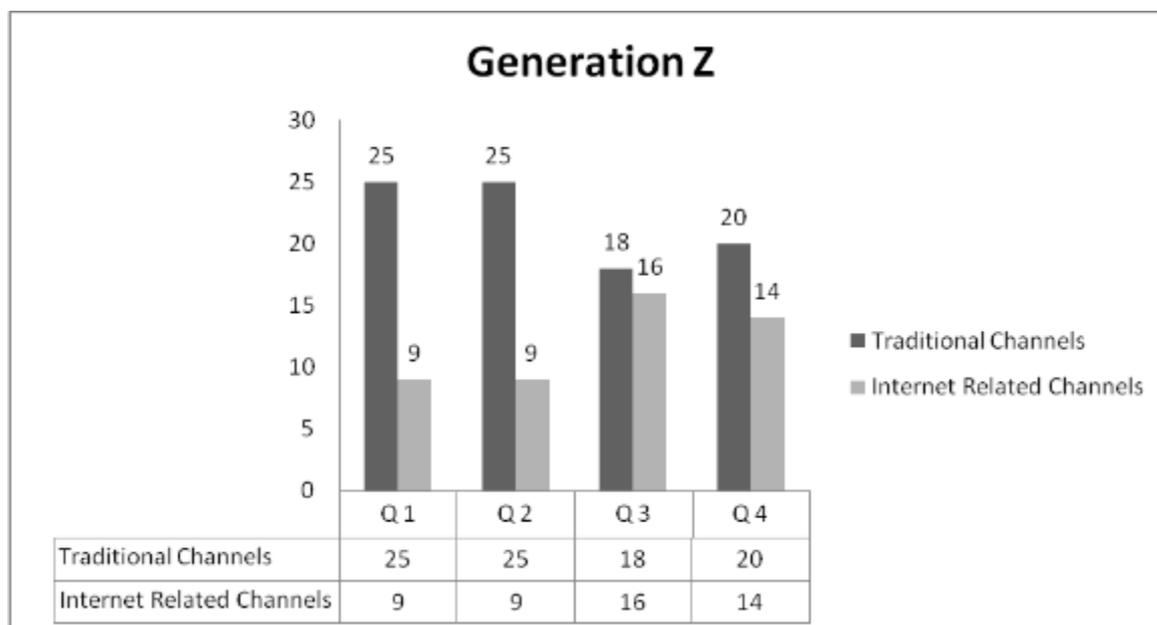


Figure 3: Channels Used by Gen Z to Obtain Information

Figure 3 shows the channels used by Gen Z to obtain information. The majority of respondents choose to read a traditional newspaper magazine. In addition, more than half of the respondents choose traditional television and listen to offline radio. Based on the responses received, it can be concluded that Gen Z chooses traditional media as a source of information compares with online media. This factor might happen because they are mainly young adults, teenagers, and children. They may not yet be exposed to the use of the Internet for purposes such as to read the news, watch television, or to listen to the radio. However, the difference for television is small, i.e., only two respondents. Therefore, it also can be deduced that Gen Z watch television both traditionally and online to get information.

Respondents' Preferences on Using a Traditional, New, or Social Medium in Sourcing Information

Part B queries on the users' preferences on whether to use traditional, new, or social media in sourcing information. This part is an extension from Part A by which the main purpose is to know what primary source of information satisfies certain needs for obtaining news, entertainment, and general knowledge. There are many channels in which to obtain information. Therefore, for this part, the sources will be grouped into three categories. The first category is traditional media, which consists of television, radio, physical newspapers, magazines, and other types of printed media. The second category is new media. It consists of website, portal, blog, or other sources of online news except social media. The last category is social media, which consists of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tagged, Pinterest, and other types of social media through which people can share information and interact among themselves via the Internet.

Similar to Part A, respondents are allowed to tick more than one choice because it will help to correctly identify which source they actually use. This also will suggest the preference of users of the mass media. Question 5 asks what is their main source of news, while Question 6 asks what is the source for entertainment. Question 7 asks what is their source of general knowledge, and question 8 asks where they spend most of their time between all of the major types of media to obtain information.

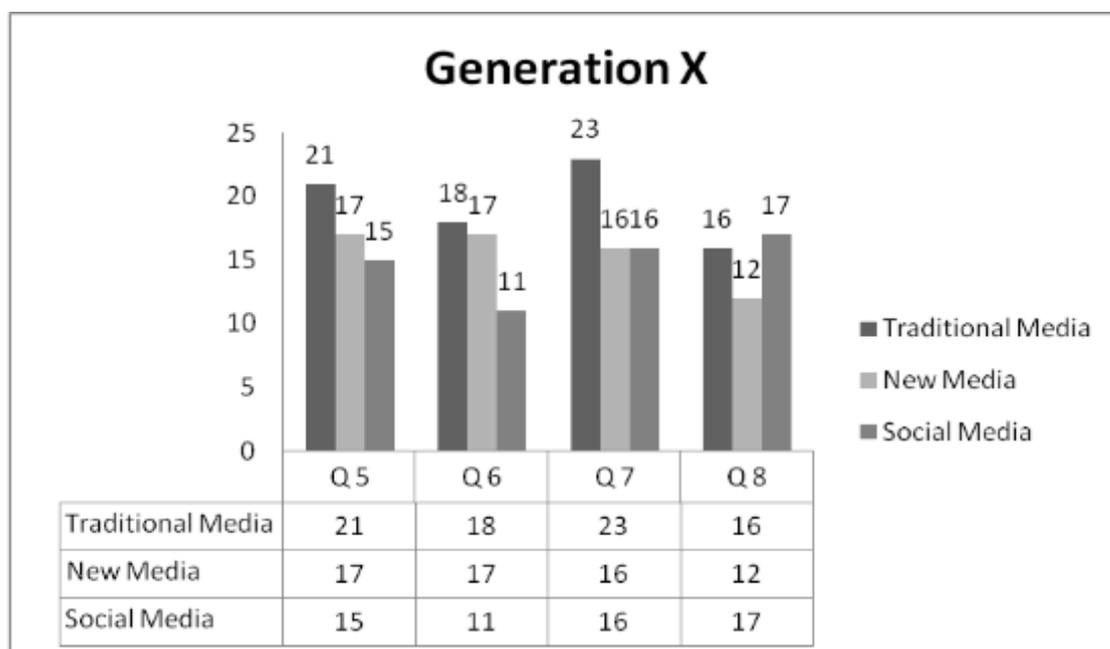


Figure 4: Sources Used by Gen X in Obtaining Information

Figure 4 shows the sources Gen X use to obtain information. The majority of respondents choose traditional media to listen to news and as a source of entertainment. This media also become their main choice in finding knowledge. The majority of respondents also choose social media to spend most of their time between all of the major types of media to obtain information. From this result, it can be concluded that, although Gen X spend more time in social media, its main source of information is still by using traditional media. This situation might be happening because people spend more time on the Internet to interact among each other, primarily as a way of communication rather than just for information. This pattern is becoming increasingly common these days, as people see the Internet as an interactive device and more suitable for communication. This can be proven by the high popularity of social apps such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, compared with non-social apps such as Metro Online, Picasa, and Evernote.

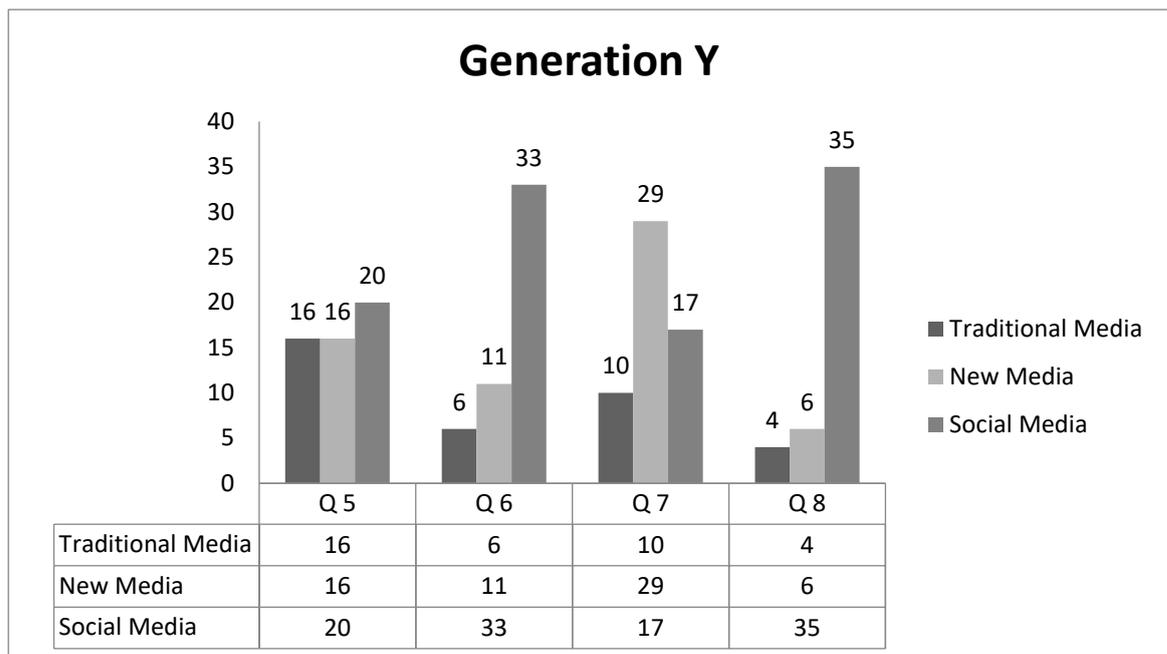


Figure 5: Sources Used by Gen Y in Obtaining Information

Figure 5 shows the sources Gen Y use to obtain information. The majority of respondents choose social media as a source of their news and entertainment. This media also is the most time spent for them as compared with other media to obtain information. In terms of general knowledge, they prefer new media as a platform to search for information. Based on Figure 5, it can be concluded that Gen Y spends more time in social media and obtains information from it. An exception for this is for general knowledge whereby their main source of information is the new media. This situation might be due to people in Gen Y who did not rely on social media but find extra references using search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Bing, Baidu, and many more. This result also might be happening because most of Gen Y respondents are university or college students, whereby, as a student, they will use search engines as the main tool to quickly obtain information and to obtain opinions from various sources.

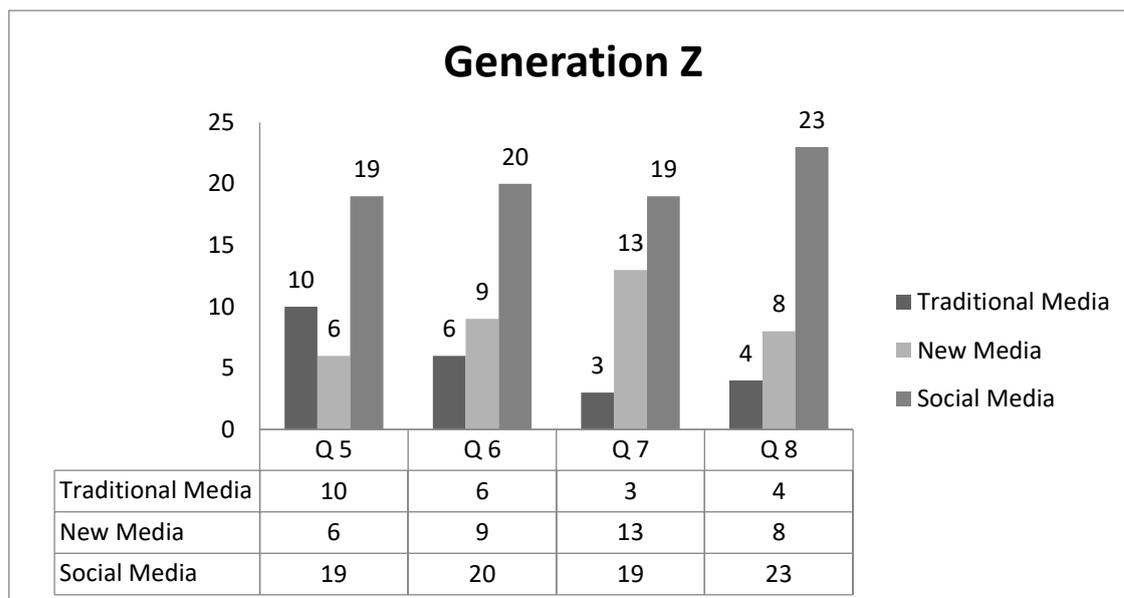


Figure 6: Sources Used by Gen Y in Obtaining Information

Figure 6 shows the sources that Gen Z uses to obtain information. It was found that social media is the main vehicle for them to listen to the news, get entertainment, and search for general knowledge. Not surprising, this media also is where they spend most of their time to obtain information. Based on these responses, it can be concluded that Gen Z spends more time in social media, and their main source of information also is through social media. This situation might be happening because people in Gen Z use the Internet and social media as a tool to interact with their friends. They are strongly influenced by the role the Internet generally plays in their social life. This situation also might be happening because half of the respondents in Gen X are 13 years of age. At this stage of life, specifically, at the early teenage stage, people like to interact among each. Their main channel is through social media. They might not even bother with current news and general knowledge because those are commonly associated with older generations.

Results on the Relative Information of Advertisement on Traditional, New, and Social Media

Part C focuses on information that can be obtained from users in terms of their reaction toward advertisements in traditional, new, and social media. This section has four questions. In this part, a Likert scale was used. Therefore, respondents can choose only one answer for each question. Part C is looking at the degree of behavior of media users toward advertisements in media channel. This part is quite interesting because it identifies two things. First, it measures the reaction of media users toward advertisements. The reaction may be positive or negative and will help to identify which type of media is more successful in catching users' attention. Second, it will help media providers to identify statistically which type of media is more suitable for them to advertise. This is important because the cost of media production is high and users will not always buy it. Thus, this will lead to financial loss and ineffective advertising.

On the other hand, advertising can be used to lower the price of a certain media or even completely eradicate the cost. This can be seen in certain channels such as YouTube, which does not require any payment from the users. The only price required from users is they have to watch various advertisements before they can enjoy the benefits of the channel. The same

concept can be used for other types of media, too. For example, the price of newspapers can be lowered by including advertisements inside the newspaper along with other regular materials. The more payment received from advertisers, the cheaper the price of the newspaper. In Malaysia, a popular newspaper, *The Sun*, for instance, is widely distributed nationwide for free.

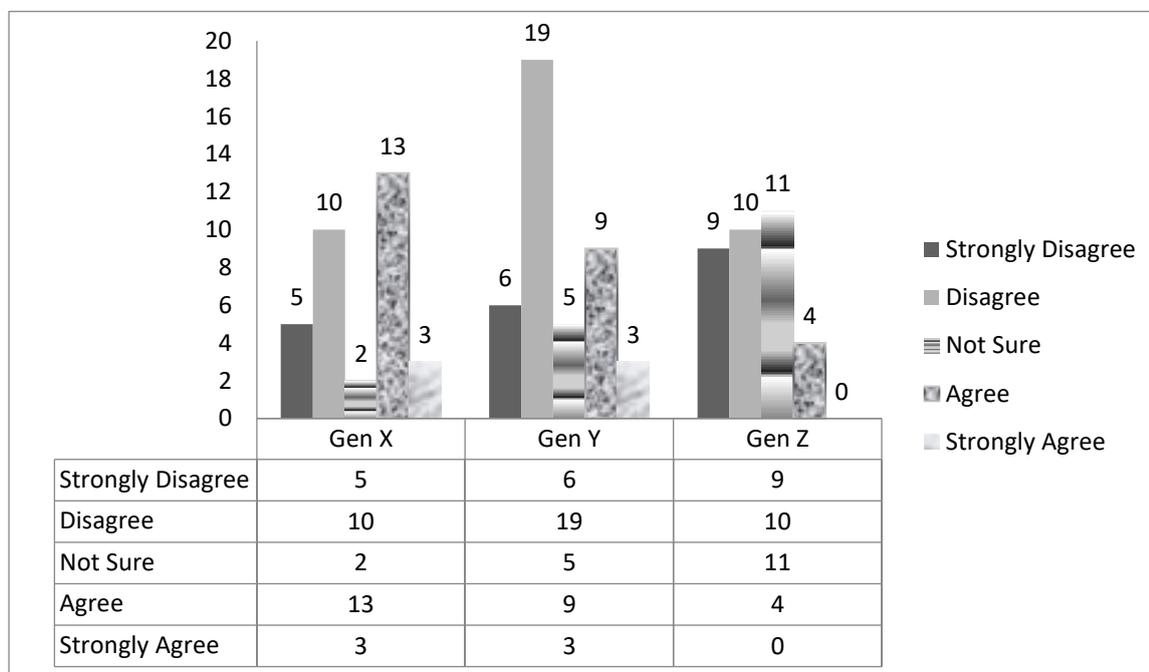


Figure 7: Buying Goods or Services after Seeing Advertisements in Newspapers and Magazines

Figure 7 shows the behavior of users after seeing an advertisement in newspapers and magazines. The majority of people in Gen X agree that they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisements in newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, the majority of Gen Y disagree that they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisement in newspapers and magazines. Meanwhile, a majority of Gen Z are not sure they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisement in newspapers and magazines.

This result is not surprising, as most Gen Xers are more inclined to using traditional media in their daily lives and are therefore more exposed to advertisements in them. In addition to this, they may find advertisement in newspapers and magazines to be more credible and trusted. As they have the most buying power compared with other generations, they are also much more easily to be influenced by advertisements.

Gen Y, on the other hand, mostly disagrees with advertisements in this type of media. A reason for this might be that they find such advertisements to be uninteresting compared with what they commonly see in other types of media. The same reason may apply for the answer of Gen Z.

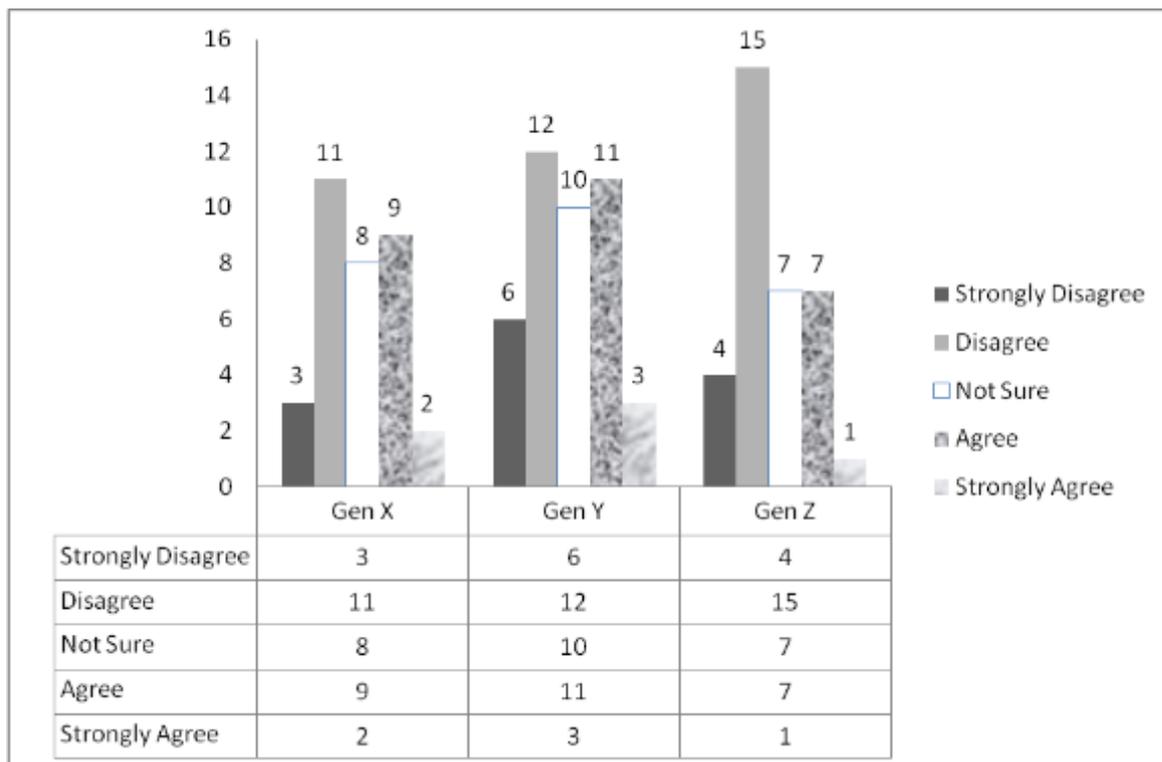


Figure 8: Buying Goods or Services after Seeing Advertisements in Televisions and Radios

Figure 8 shows user behavior after seeing advertisements in televisions and radios. The majority of Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z disagree that they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisements in these types of media. This result is slightly surprising, as it shows the ineffectiveness of advertisements in television and radio. Possibly, the cause of this may be because most people find advertisements in these types of media to be merely a nuisance. They would mostly change the channel or just will not watch or listen at all. The effect of this behavior in a household would be significant, as there is commonly only one television and radio per household. If one member of the household changes the channel, all will be affected. This causes the advertisements to be less effective in reaching the general audience.

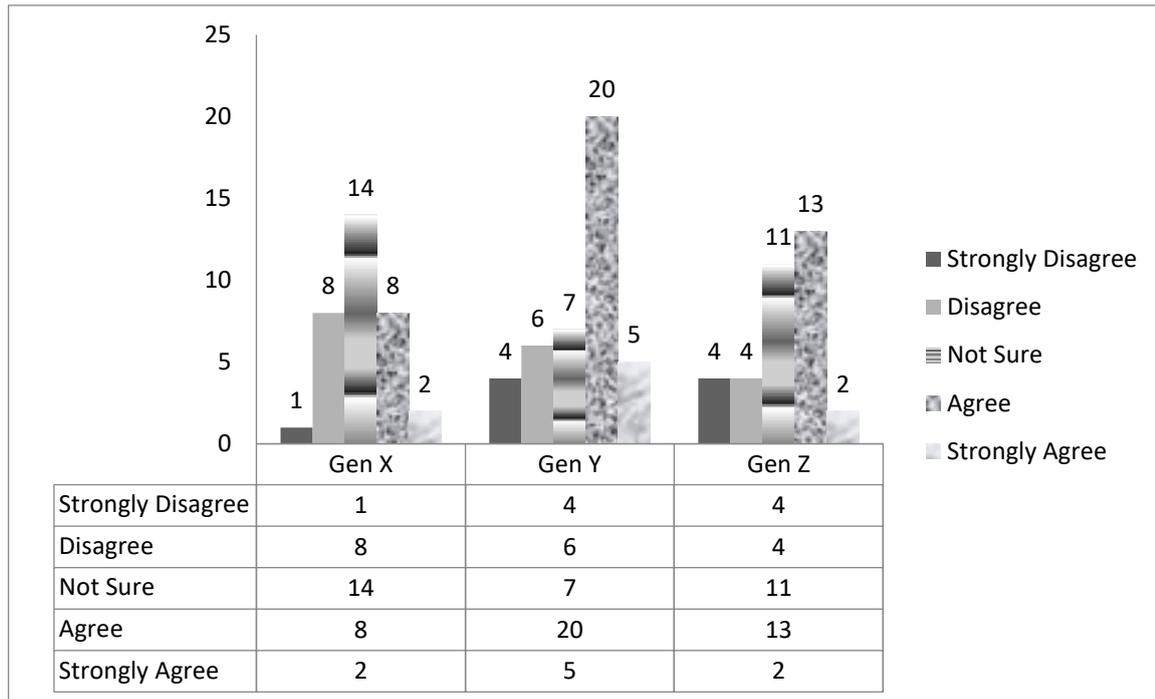


Figure 9: Buying Goods or Services after Seeing Advertisements in New Media

Figure 9 shows the behavior of users after seeing advertisements in new media. The majority of Gen X are not sure that they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisements in new media. On the other hand, a majority of Gen Y and Gen Z agree that they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisement in new media. The reason for the reluctance of Gen X to buy a certain good or service after seeing advertisements in new media may be because they are not as exposed to the new media compared with the other generations. Thus, they may find the advertisements to be less believable. Gen Y and Gen Z mostly agree on buying because of the Internet’s general appeal. This is also contributed to the fact that Gen Y and Gen Z spend a lot of time browsing the Internet.

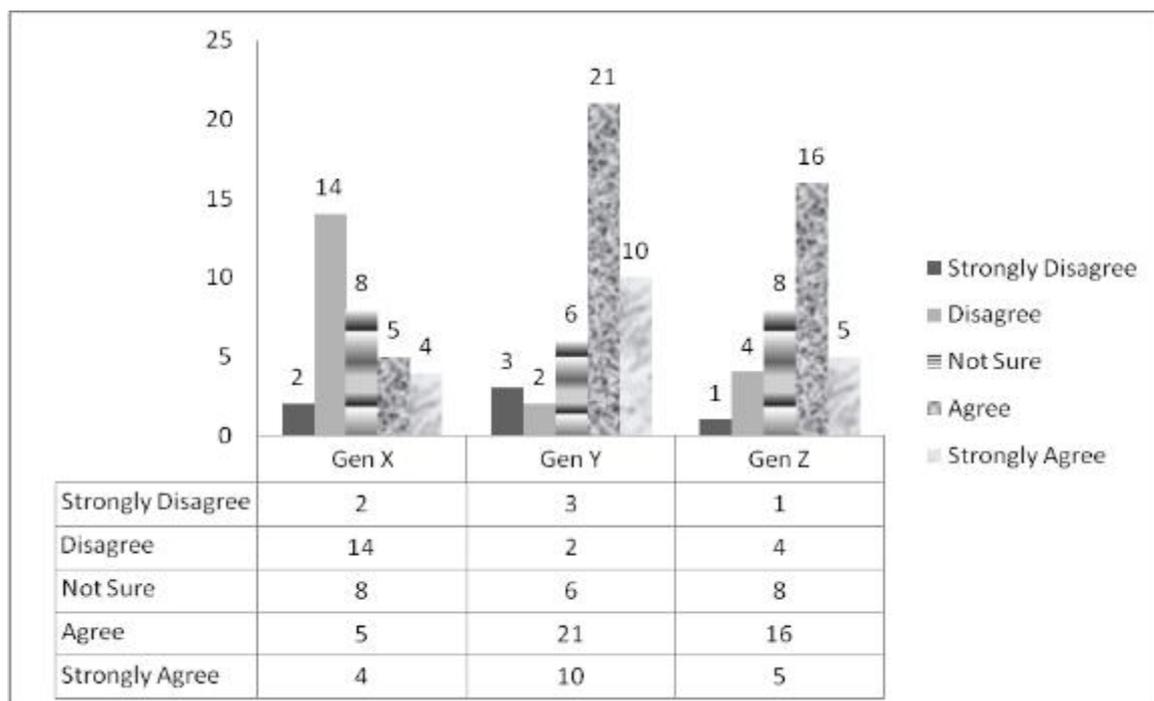


Figure 10: Buying Goods or Services after Seeing Advertisements in Social Media

Figure 10 shows the behavior of users after seeing advertisements in social media. A majority of Gen X disagree that they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisements in social media. On the other hand, a majority of Gen Y and Gen Z agree that they will buy goods or services after seeing advertisement in social media. The reason for this result does not differ far from the reason behind their reactions to advertisements in new media. This is because the Internet and social media are closely related. An added factor to this may be because Gen X is more mature and experienced. Throughout the years, the Internet and social media have been flooded by scammers aiming to gain money by tricking people. Gen X may avoid buying goods and products they see online altogether to avoid being scammed.

On the other hand, the reason Gen Y and Gen Z mostly agree on buying may be because of the appeal of such advertisements. Advertisements on the Internet and social media are more creative, interesting, and the products often costs less.

Conclusions

The purposes of this study are to find out whether or not users prefer to access information via the Internet, examine whether users like to use traditional, new, or social media and determine the relative influence of advertisement on traditional, new, or social media.

The result indicates that Gen X and Gen Z prefer to use traditional media while Gen Y prefers to use traditional channels except for newspapers. This shows that a majority of people like to use traditional media channels, and this is good news for traditional media companies. Thus, traditional media channels are found to be still relevant and are able to compete with Internet-related media channels.

The study also found that Gen X likes to get information from traditional media. Gen Y likes to get information from social media. However, for the sake of knowledge, they prefer to use new media. Meanwhile, Gen Z prefers to get information from social media. All generations have similar behavior; thus, they are inclined to spent most of their time using social media compared with other forms of media. It shows that the new generation (Gen Z)

has already shifted their preference to using social media in gathering information compared to the older generation (Gen X).

Finally, it was found that all respondents do not agree that advertisement in traditional media can influence them. An exception is for Gen X who stated that advertisements in newspaper and magazine have an influence toward them. On the other hand, advertisements in new media can influence all respondents. With the exception of Gen X, all agree that advertisements in social media can influence them. It shows that advertisements in new media and social media can influence Gen Y and Gen Z. Moreover, this result also is one of the reasons why advertisers reduced advertising spending in traditional media (Zentner 2012).

This study has several implications. First, traditional media companies should embrace multiple channels in order to increase the number of users of a channel. These companies should not stick only with traditional mediums but expand their service to the Internet, so that information can be accessed anywhere and anytime. With advancements in technology, electronic devices such as smart phones and tablets (PC) are being used widely because they are small, lightweight, and portable. People can browse through the web and read information from these devices.

Second, media contents need improvement in order to generate more appeal for readers. Media companies should be ready to take on breaking news, weird news, popular stories, and stories that induce discussion and debate. Therefore, to increase readership, the traditional media company should find ways to acquire these types of stories such as by hiring good reporters and be sensitive with developments of popular stories, which would be trending and become viral on the web.

Finally, media owners need to establish good strategies to draw more advertisements. In order to attract more advertisers, the traditional company can offer a low price to advertisers, place their advertisement in a strategic location, and show them during prime time. For example, a television company can place advertisement during prime hours, e.g., during the news because, at this particular time, news typically has many viewers. Moreover, newspaper companies can offer colored advertisement at a black and white rate. Therefore, it is more appealing to advertisers.

Limitations And Suggestions For Future Research

This study has several limitations. This research is conducted only in Klang Valley due to limited time frame and budget. Therefore, this research is unable to cover other geographical area, and the result cannot be widely generalized. Half of the respondents for Gen Z are aged 13. At this age, they are possibly not yet matured to think carefully and wisely about news they read in social media. Another limitation is the number of respondents involved in the study. In order to obtain a more accurate result, more subjects should be questioned.

Future research should focus on the impact of advertisements in social media. According to this research, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z spend more time using social media compared with other forms of media. In social media such as Facebook, there is a lot of advertisement, as advertisers gradually shift from normal websites or personal blogs to social media. This will help to create a new culture of buying items, whereby buyers may tend to buy items online because it is easier, and there is less hassle compared with going to an actual shop. In addition, products online are often cheaper and, thus, are more appealing to buyers.

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