The Gen Z's Learning Experiences and Its Relationship to Social Media Use

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the degree of learning experiences, the extent of social media use, and their relationship. It involved 500 first-year IT students considered part of Generation Z as respondents enrolled in a state university in Central Luzon, Philippines. Utilizing the quantitative research method, the researcher employed a descriptive-correlational design to identify and analyze the variables under investigation. The researcher found out that IT students have a high degree of learning experiences. The results implied that the students actively attended, engaged, and participated in the university's different programs and activities for their holistic development. The students' social media use was also high in terms of its Entertainment and Socialization, Communication, and Academic purposes. This study also found that learning experiences significantly correlate with social media use. The researcher suggests that the results of this study may be used as a basis for crafting and conducting new programs and activities relating to enriching the students' learning experiences in the college. Also, in conducting new research, the results of this study may be used as a reference.

Keyword: - Generation Z, Learning Experience, Social Media

1. INTRODUCTION AND A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

As the global landscape thrives and people continue innovating, new opportunities and challenges arise. Globalization and continued advancements call for a need to unceasingly improve the quality of education and the teaching and learning process so that the coming generations may reap the positive impacts of today's effort. The need to learn, unlearn, and relearn is essential to stay updated and be aware of the recent developments in the environment.

Learning is undoubtedly one of the keys to success. It is a process of change where human dispositions or capabilities may evolve after acquiring different knowledge and skills essential for solving future problems and opportunities [1], [2]. It can lead to change, which can be attributed to experiences and new knowledge and expertise gained [3], [4]. Learning involves strengthening the correct abilities, traits, and characteristics while weakening the incorrect ones [5]. Thus, learning is an essential factor in achieving the utmost potential of every individual. It proves that learning makes people reach great heights. Thus advancements and innovations are consistently observed and obtained through the years.

Today, 21st-century teaching and learning are practiced. Different academic institutions have already shifted from the conventional way of delivering quality education to a more advanced and technology-driven approach without sacrificing the quality while achieving the goals of education in different parts of the world.

In the Philippines, the Republic Act No. 10533 or the [6] passage has opened new opportunities and challenges in the education sector. It required a shift in the practices and conventional manner of educating the young generations from primary, secondary, tertiary, and graduate education. RA 10533 has brought three distinct changes in every educational level in the country. It was observed that because of the shift, the elementary level – while focusing on the input-based way of educating the learners, strives to enhance the level of literacy in the country by enriching the

curriculum to be more contextualized. The secondary level became more competency-based. The curriculum addresses the need to acquire the necessary competencies essential for learners. At the same time, tertiary education now shifts to outcomes-based education. These changes required a deeper understanding of the learning processes in formal, informal, or non-formal training.

Learning Process

Learning processes involve several mental processes and activities that result in to change in behavior. It includes operations to achieve educational objectives in different cultural and social contents that acquire new knowledge and skills, influencing human attitudes, decisions, and actions. The entire learning process involves active testing of acquired knowledge and insights, authentic experiences, and reflective observation and activities [7] [8] [9] [10].

The cycle of the learning process is also conducted to transfer knowledge and ideas through different learning styles. According to [11], learning styles are the composite characteristics that serve as stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact, and respond to their environment. Composite features include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Learning aspects are the preferred means for students to absorb the results of the process, comprehend, and retain information. It is important to note that every student has a unique combination of learning styles and changes over time. That is, learning styles are not fixed nor predetermined and constant.

The VARD Learning Model introduced by [12] helps understand how individuals learn. VARK or Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic are the significant classifications of learning styles included in the model. Individuals may have a combination of these learning styles, but there are dominant learning styles compared to others. Chick [13] explains that though there are different learning styles, the ones that dominate the most are the personal preferences in which learners learn best. Strauss [14] cites what Howard Gardner explained about the difference between learning styles and multiple intelligences. As quoted by [14], Gardner clarified that learning styles are not the sample with multiple intelligence. Though different learning styles may be associated with multiple intelligences, it is still clear that the two are not the same. These are complementary, and both contribute to learning, but not equally the same [15]. Gardner [16] identified eight intelligences vital for holistic education.

Holistic education encompasses the learners' intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative, and spiritual potentials. Thus, different components must be considered when preparing activities and programs to achieve the ultimate goal of education. In providing different learning experiences, the components of holistic education can be used and incorporated.

Learning Experiences

Learning experiences may take place in the traditional and non-traditional academic setting. Traditional educational background includes schools, and learners can interact and share ideas in the classroom. On the other hand, the non-traditional academic setting has outside-of-the-school locations and an outdoor environment. Regardless of the setting, learning experiences refer to any interaction, course, program, and experiences where learning happens [17]. These opportunities may cause the learners to transform their perceptions about things, enable conceptual understanding, yield emotional qualities, and improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes [18]. The quality of learning experiences may be affected by the university as a whole, the practice of the teachers, and the learners. The university affects the students' learning experiences because of the educational leaders' commitment to guide and train the teachers, the choice and focus of placement of learners, and the criteria for assessing them. The teachers' practice of teaching, on the other hand, affects the quality of the learning experience. It can be affected in terms of the type of service setting and the learning opportunities within and resources associated with the service setting, the role of the teachers as a practitioner, and the learning and teaching preferences. Lastly, the students affect the quality of the learning experiences in terms of the identified learning needs, learning preferences, skills, confidence, and learning attitude. It is important to note that these factors contribute to the overall learning experiences in an academic environment, and there are essential elements of a great learning experience.

Sebastian [19] cites that a great learning experience adds value to the learners, focuses on effectiveness, and promotes further learning. An academic institution that provides a diverse learning opportunity to learners enables them to acquire valuable knowledge to enhance and improve their gained knowledge and skills. Article XIV of the 1987 Philippine Constitution mandates the state to establish means, construct, implement, and promulgate necessary

policies, rules, and regulations to support the quality of education in the country. The Commission on Higher Education is responsible for crafting policies, guidelines, and standards related to higher education. In 2013, CHED memorandum order no. 9 was released mandating higher education institutions to adhere to the enhanced policies and guidelines on student affairs and services (SAS) [20]. SAS is one of an academic institution's essential components because they spear in conducting different programs and activities vital for students' holistic development. These activities contribute to the overall learning experience of learners.

The learning experiences provided to students should always consider the context of the environment and the type of learners who experience it because learning experiences and activities do not always adhere to the "one size fits all" practice. That is, educational leaders must consider the generation where the learners belong since the Generation Z of learners is a more technology-driven group of individuals. Today, students in tertiary education are composed of Generation Z learners or those who were born from 1997 to 2012 [21]. They are the individuals who possess technology-driven lifestyles, are highly connected, and living in an era of high-technology communication and creative use of social media. Also, this group of individuals has an informal, individual, and very straightforward way of communicating, making social media a vital part of their lives [22].

Social Media Use

Sharma [23] cites the different positive and negative uses of social media. Accordingly, positive benefits include using social media, which can lead people to productively use their time, enjoy a peaceful and happy disposition and positive mindset, and enable people to engage in a healthy exchange of ideas and thoughts with other people.

On the other hand, negative uses of social media manifest negative habits and behaviors to people. Social media use affects students' overall learning experiences because it has brought negative and positive impacts that contribute to their overall holistic development. Olipas and Leona [24] cite that social media engagement significantly impacts college students. It was found out that social media use can substantially impact its use for entertainment and socialization purposes, communication, and academic purposes.

While there are studies involving learning experiences and social media engagements, the researcher pursues this kind of study to assess these variables in the context of a state university involving first-year IT students or the Generation Z of learners to answer the identified problem for this study. Also, there is a need to unveil new results and information about social media use and learning experiences of generation Z to support existing studies and provide new opportunities for other researchers to conduct the same to refine and broaden the existing pool of knowledge and information available.

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Specifically, it aims to answer the following:

- 1. What is the demographic profile of the IT students in terms of:
 - 1.1. Sex; and
 - 1.2. Monthly Family Income?
- 2. What is the degree of learning experiences of the IT students?
- 3. What is the extent of social media use among IT students?
- 4. What is the relationship between the learning experiences and social media use of the IT students?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Method

This study utilized a quantitative research method to assess the extent of social media use and IT students' learning experiences. Quantitative research is data-oriented. It involves the systematic process of investigating a phenomenon by gathering quantifiable data. These data are then organized, processed, analyzed, and interpreted using statistical, mathematical, or computation techniques. The assessment made has been supported by empirical data gathered for better analysis. The data has been presented using the descriptive-correlational design since this study aimed at describing and looking at the possible relationship between the variables. To ensure the quality of the data gathered for this study, the researcher performed methodological triangulation, including observation, questionnaires, and random interviews with respondents to establish reliable and accurate results.

2.2 Research Locale and Respondents

Conducted in a state university in Central Luzon, Philippines, this study involved the first-year IT students in assessing the extent of using social media and learning experiences. Five-hundred (500) students participated in this study during the Academic Year 2019-2020.

2.3 Research Instrument and Procedure of the Study

In the first semester of AY 2019-2020, the researcher conducted an initial observation and random interview with first-year students to gather relevant information essential in constructing the instrument. The results were supported by related literature and studies to properly identify the information needed to develop the instrument. When the instrument was developed, the researcher allowed experts to check its content validity. Afterward, the inter-rater reliability analysis was performed to determine if the developed tool was acceptable, valid, and sufficient.

The inter-rater reliability analysis of the instruments used in this study shows an acceptable value as supported by [25]. The social media use questionnaire with Cronbach Alpha of .869 and the Student Learning Experiences Questionnaire with a Cronbach Alpha of .856 indicates that the developed instruments were sufficient, reliable, and adequate..

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 The Demographic Profile of the Respondents

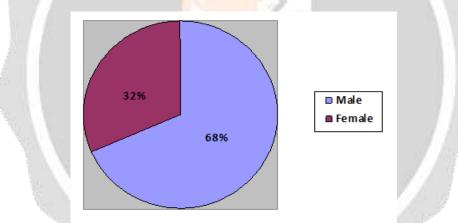


Fig. 1. The frequency distribution according to Sex

Figure 1 presents the frequency distribution according to sex. The figure shows that 32% of the respondents were female, and 68% were male. The results revealed a 36% difference based on sex among the first-year IT students. In the computing-related programs, studies of [26], [27], and [24] have cited that more male students pursue IT courses because of different factors and reasons. Appianing and Van Eck [28] explains that the lack of female role models in the computing-related programs, the male domain culture of Information Technology, computer self-efficacy and computer anxiety, family and peer influences, and the impact of computing experiences were some of the hindrances why there was an only small number of female IT students compared to male. This result opens up opportunities for educational institutions to make computing programs more gender-oriented and lessen, if not avoid, gender bias to increase female IT professionals' number.

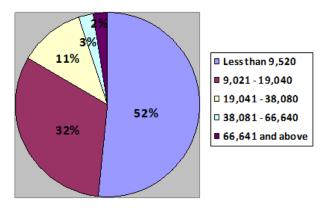


Fig. 2. The frequency distribution according to Monthly Family Income

The result of the frequency distribution according to the monthly family income was presented in Figure 2. In general, the income bracket with a value of less than 9,520 got the highest percentage rating of 52%, indicating that more than half of the respondents belong to the lowest income bracket. On the other hand, there were 32% of respondents with monthly family income from 9,021 to 19,040, 11% for 19,041 to 38,080, 3% for 38,081 to 66,640, and 2% for the remaining income bracket of 66,641 and above. These results show that although more students belong to the lowest income bracket, equitable access to quality tertiary education has become evident in the Philippines. The increasing number of students in the lowest income bracket having the opportunity to have a college education is one of the impacts of Republic Act no. 10931 or the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education. This act provides free tuition and other school fees in state universities and colleges, local universities, and colleges and state-run technical-vocational institutions in the Philippines.

3.2 The Learning Experiences of the IT Students

Table 1

| Items | Mean | SD^{a} | Rank |
|---|------|----------|------|
| I use the library and learning resource centers. | 2.98 | .680 | 8 |
| I use the computer and information technology tools to equip myself. | 3.23 | .515 | 1 |
| I engage in different course learning experiences. | 3.04 | .556 | 6 |
| I allow myself to participate in writing activities. | 2.96 | .624 | 9 |
| I engage in scientific and quantitative experiences. | 2.93 | .607 | 10 |
| I attend arts, music, and theatre events. | 2.81 | .705 | 12 |
| I participate in different clubs and organizations. | 2.79 | .698 | 13 |
| I am able to express my thoughts and ideas through meaningful conversations. | 3.13 | .559 | 2 |
| I engage in personal development activities. | 2.99 | .599 | 7 |
| I engaged in discussing a variety of conversation topics. | 2.99 | .571 | 7 |
| I use the things I learned in the classroom in different conversations or exchanges of information and ideas. | 3.11 | .529 | 4 |
| I attend to flag-raising ceremonies and other activities relevant to fostering nationalism. | 2.99 | .620 | 7 |
| I enjoy socializing with friends, developing my social skills through student centres and lounges. | 3.12 | .591 | 3 |
| I engage in sports activities at the university. | 2.89 | .703 | 11 |
| I engage in meaningful conversations with my instructors and professors. | 3.08 | .552 | 5 |

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| Items | Mean | SD^{a} | Rank |
|--------------------|------|----------|------|
| Overall Grand Mean | 3.00 | .351 | |

*SD-Standard Deviation

The assessment results on the learning experiences among the first-year IT students are presented in Table 1. In general, the IT students have a high degree of the learning experience, as reflected in the computed overall grand mean of 3.00 (SD = .351). Results imply that the students actively attended, participated, engaged, and were involved in the university's different learning activities and programs, which contributes to their overall learning experiences and holistic development. Specifically, students viewed the activity of using computers and information technology tools as the most frequently experienced learning activity where they were able to apply their 21st-century skills (μ =3.23 SD=.515 Rank = 1), the ability to express their thoughts and ideas through meaningful conversation (μ =3.13 SD=.599 Rank = 2), and opportunity to socialize with friends to develop and enhance their social skills (μ =3.12 SD=.591 Rank = 3). On the other hand, participating in the different clubs and organizations (μ =.79 SD=.698 Rank = 13) was one of the three least learning activities being participated and engaged by IT students along with attending arts, music, and theater events (μ =2.81 SD=.705 Rank = 12), and engaging in sports activity in the university (μ =2.89 SD=.703 Rank = 11). While it still is observed that the data presents a high degree of engagement to different learning experiences, these three learning experiences can be improved and enhanced so that the students would increase their interest and involvement in the coming years.

3.3 Social Media Use of IT Students

Table 2The Social Media Use of IT Students

| The social media Ose of 11 Stations | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------|-----------------|--|
| Factors | Mean | SD ^a | Verbal Description |
| Academic | 3.15 | .360 | Large Extent |
| Communication | 3.12 | .357 | Large Extent |
| Entertainment and Socialization | 3.08 | .388 | Large Extent |
| Overall Grand Mean | 3.11 | .322 | Large Extent |
| 100 0 1 10 1 1 | | | 1. |

^a SD – Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows the social media use of IT, students, in terms of three factors: Academic, Communication, Entertainment, and Socialization. In general, the engagement was, to a large extent (μ =3.11, SD=.322). This implies that students frequently use social media for academic, communication, entertainment, and socialization purposes. Regarding using social media for educational purposes, the results suggest that IT students have a large extent of engagement, as reflected in the mean score of 3.15 (SD = .360). Several studies have been conducted investigating the use of social media, its effect on students' academic performance, and the influence of social media on students' study habits. All of them unveil interesting findings and results contributing to the existing body of knowledge [31], [32], and [33].

On the other hand, the extent of social media use for communication purposes was, to a large extent, based on the computed mean score of 3.12 (SD = .357). Willis [34] explains six ways how social media changed the way people communicate. Accordingly, social media created a sense of urgency and a need to share. It provided an inside perspective at faraway places, shared full stories instead of insights, made digital messages more personal, brought back news into millennial life, and provided the ability to broadcast moments. Lastly, social media for entertainment and socialization purposes got a mean score of 3.08 (SD = .388), suggesting that the extent was large in this domain. Leggatt [35] explains that more and more people have been using the internet and social media for communication and entertainment. Olipas and Leona [24] have found similar results to [35] claims, stating that Generation Z has been using social media to be entertained and attain pleasure and enjoyment.

3.3 The Relationship between Learning Experiences and Social Media Use of IT Students

| | Social Medi |
|---|-------------|
| Relationship between Learning Experience and Social Media | Use |
| Table 3 | |

| | | Social Media Use | Remarks | |
|--|---------|------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Looming Empirican | p-value | .000 | Significant Relationship | |
| Learning Experience | r-value | .473** | Significant Relationship | |
| **Completion is similiant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed) | | | | |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In Table 3, results revealed that the learning experiences of the IT students have a significant substantial positive relationship to social media use (p-value = .0000, p-value < 0.05). Meaning when the learning experiences of the IT students increase, their social media use increases. It can be drawn from the results that the engagement of IT students to social media affects their degree of learning experiences, including their engagement, involvement, and attendance to different university activities, programs, and events. The use of social media contributes to their engagement and participation in various learning activities. Gen Z today uses social media to document their daily activities. Gen Z also uses social media to communicate with their family and friends to share what is happening to them on a real-time basis.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

This study aimed to know the degree of learning experiences, the extent of social media use, and their relationship. It involved the so-called Generation Z of learners as respondents. Results show that male students (68%) outnumbered female students (32%) in terms of sex, and 52% of the respondents belong to the lowest income bracket. There was a large extent of social media use among first-year IT students, and a high degree of learning experiences was found. That is, students who are more engaged in social media can attend, engage, involve, and participate in different learning experiences for their holistic development, as reflected in the correlation table presented.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

- 1. Strengthen and continuously enhance the programs of the College of Information and Communications Technology concerning gender and development to reduce gender biases so that more female would consider getting into computing programs;
- 2. Strengthen the existing learning experiences provided by the College of Information and Communications Technology contribute to the holistic development of the students continuously;
- 3. Conduct similar studies to see how the first-year students' learning experiences differ from other year levels in order to provide a more encompassing basis for enhancing learning experiences.

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