

Managing Anxiety and Uncertainty Through Social Networking Sites, How Effectively Can Youth Communicate Online?

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the usage patterns of social networking sites among Malaysian youths and their Anxiety/Uncertainty Management levels. According to the anxiety and uncertainty management theory, members of a group should be cooperative, trustworthy, tolerant of diversity, and happy in order to affect their membership attitude and behavior. These days, youth choose to spend their time on social networking sites since they provide an effective virtual community platform for communication. Malaysian youths exhibit a nuanced understanding of personal and social identity, motivation to interact, reactions to others, social categorizations, situational processes, connection to others, ethical interactions, and overall communication effectiveness. This study surveyed 600 respondents, the findings highlight a deep-rooted integration of digital communication into the daily lives of Malaysian youths, with a significant majority having extensive experience of 11 to 20 years on SNS platforms. SNS platforms significantly reduced communication uncertainty, fostering positive relationships and smoother communication through active, passive, and interactive strategies. Locality plays a crucial role in anxiety and uncertainty management, with rural youths demonstrating better management compared to their urban counterparts, attributed to stronger social cohesion, tighter networks, and communal lifestyles. The study suggests that addressing anxiety and uncertainty can improve communication quality in virtual settings, particularly in rural areas. Social media can promote cultural integration and acceptance among diverse groups. A balanced approach to communication, emphasizing ethical interactions, can maximize its benefits. The findings can be used to design targeted interventions and promote positive digital engagement practices among Malaysian youths.

Keywords: *Virtual community, social networking sites, anxiety and uncertainty management, effective communication, digital communication.*

INTRODUCTION

In high-context cultures such as Malaysia, meaning is often more implicit and less direct compared to many Western cultures. In Malaysia, where interethnic relations are crucial, effective communication with people from different cultural backgrounds is particularly challenging. This is because the primary objective of communication is to build trust and

develop relationships rather than merely exchange facts and information. The concept of uncertainty avoidance, as proposed by Hofstede, is a significant factor influencing communication effectiveness, particularly in culturally diverse contexts such as Malaysia. This dimension has been studied extensively in various sectors within Malaysia, shedding light on its impact on communication dynamics (Mahomed et al., 2018).

The article by Jan et al. (2024) explores the application of Hofstede's cultural dimensions in technology acceptance models. The meta-analysis examines how these dimensions influence the acceptance and adoption of technology. Uncertainty avoidance reflects a society's tolerance for ambiguity and risk, with cultures high in uncertainty avoidance favoring established technologies with predictable outcomes over novel or risky innovations. Long-term vs. short-term orientation examines a society's time horizon and values perseverance, thrift, and future rewards, potentially influencing technology adoption by valuing technologies that offer sustained benefits and align with long-term goals.

In the construction industry and public universities of Malaysia, uncertainty avoidance has been linked to job performance among government employees (Ohueri et al., 2023), the adoption of e-commerce (Hasan et al., 2020), and email usage patterns in academic settings (Belkhamza & Wafa, 2014; Mahomed et al., 2018). The underlying cultural preference for structured communication processes, regulatory adherence, and risk aversion stemming from uncertainty avoidance can pose challenges to effective communication strategies. For instance, the tendency to avoid risks may inhibit open communication channels necessary for innovation and problem-solving in construction projects or academic collaborations.

Addressing cultural dimensions is crucial for enhancing communication strategies in Malaysia, particularly in diverse settings where collaboration and information exchange are key (Mohamed Saad & Sudin, 2022). Hofstede's cultural dimensions, such as uncertainty avoidance, provide valuable insights into these dynamics. Alqarni (2022) critically analyzed Hofstede's dimensions, finding that power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity significantly influence learning behaviors and styles across various cultural contexts. This indicates that managing uncertainty is vital for improving communication practices, as uncertainty avoidance can induce anxiety.

Effective intercultural communication is essential in Malaysia's plural society. Gill et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of sharing principles and values to foster social unity. However, challenges persist, including distrust and ethnic tensions (Musa & Jalil, 2013; Shamsuddin et al., 2015). Addressing these issues requires promoting social attitudes that encourage acceptance and understanding of diversity (Awang et al., 2017). The role of social networking sites (SNS) in facilitating communication and adaptation among international students in Malaysia underscores the importance of effective communication strategies (Wong & Liu, 2024).

The rapid adoption of communication technology has transformed intercultural interactions. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2014) noted that Malaysians spend significant time on SNS, which has become a primary platform for virtual communities. Nordin et al. (2022) found that the preferences of Generation Z in Malaysia for e-learning interface design have shifted, reflecting a lower power distance compared to traditional Hofstede scores. This suggests that modern communication practices should consider these evolving preferences.

In the context of online interactions, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has been shown to influence social networking site usage. Gioia et al. (2021) observed that FoMO directly predicts problematic SNS use, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the need for effective management of online communication attitudes. Furthermore, Bukhari et al. (2020) revealed that Facebook groups are a valuable resource for international students seeking information, emphasizing the role of SNS in supporting social engagement and adaptation. Overall, addressing these cultural and technological factors is essential for improving communication strategies and fostering effective intercultural interactions in Malaysia.

Anxiety and uncertainty are mental processes that significantly impact connections between groups. Group identification, contact, and prejudice play crucial roles in shaping these processes (Imamura & Zhang, 2014). Recent literature highlights the pervasive nature of uncertainty and its effects on social identity and group dynamics. Hogg (2021) provides an in-depth analysis of uncertainty-identity theory, emphasizing that self-uncertainty motivates individuals to seek group identification as a means to reduce their sense of insecurity. This identification process is crucial for understanding both positive and negative social behaviors, including radicalization and extremism. Groups that offer a clear, distinctive identity are particularly effective in alleviating self-uncertainty, while those with ambiguous identities may contribute to increased social conflict (Hogg, 2021; Hogg & Gaffney, 2023).

Social identity exploration also plays a critical role in moderating the link between identification and prejudice. Spiegler et al. (2022) found that active exploration of one's social identity can reduce prejudice by diminishing intergroup threat and promoting more positive attitudes towards outgroups. This process highlights the importance of understanding and reflecting on one's group membership to foster better intergroup relations. In the context of Malaysia, Hofstede's insights into high-context cultures indicate that Malaysians generally handle uncertainty well and value group harmony (Huda et al., 2020). However, despite this cultural tendency, intergroup trust remains a challenge (Huda et al., 2020). Research by Mu Hung (2014) and Walkenhorst (2018) points to persistent racial distrust, which undermines community cohesion. Trust is essential for building strong relationships and fostering community growth (Gudykunst, 2005). Hamid et al. (2016) demonstrated that high levels of trust within communities lead to safer neighborhoods and greater acceptance of diversity. Conversely, a lack of effort to maintain trust can erode social cohesion (Lim et al., 2017). Furthermore, Nor et al. (2018) found that young people with lower trust levels exhibit less commitment and skill in volunteer activities, further emphasizing the importance of trust in community engagement.

Recent studies also underscore the complex role of language and uncertainty in shaping intergroup attitudes. Stopp (2024) examined how language contact influences intergroup relations and found that increased language contact could either exacerbate or alleviate prejudice, depending on the perceived status and distinctiveness of the outgroup and the level of uncertainty about one's group membership. This nuanced understanding adds to the broader discussion of how language and identity interact in shaping intergroup dynamics. In summary, these findings illustrate that managing anxiety and uncertainties in virtual communities and beyond involves a multifaceted approach that includes fostering strong group identities, promoting identity exploration, and addressing trust and language factors. The integration of these elements can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of group behavior and intergroup relations.

Hilliard et al. (2020) point out that fear of strangers' negative judgments, and worries about inactive group members lead to anxiety. Yet, as people face and resolve their doubts instead of avoiding them, their anxiety tends to decrease over time. Moreover, communication's role in building trust across various contexts cannot be understated. In post-conflict societies like Northern Ireland, civil society organizations leverage communication as a tool to build trust and demonstrate trustworthiness (Rice et al., 2021). Trust attribution has evolved from institutional trust to interpersonal trust, emphasizing the need for effective communication strategies to foster trust relationships.

The significance of effective communication in diverse contexts is underscored by various research findings. For instance, in marine science, Hind-Ozan et al. (2017) emphasize the necessity of clear and timely communication between scientists and stakeholders to maintain trust and project engagement. This sentiment resonates within organizational settings as well, as highlighted by Pološki Vokić et al. (2021), who found a significant correlation between internal communication satisfaction and organizational trust, emphasizing the role of effective communication in nurturing trust among employees. Moreover, Porumbescu et al. (2013) emphasize that supervisors' interpersonal communication strategies in public organizations are crucial for building vertical trust among subordinates.

On a broader scale, human communication stands as the cornerstone of interpersonal interaction, incorporating verbal and non-verbal elements that convey emotions, meanings, and intentions (Pikhart, 2020). This notion is further supported by Forsgren and Saldert (2022), who highlight the paramount importance of effective communication in fostering productive relationships, enhancing organizational competitiveness, and ensuring safety across various domains.

Adding to this complexity are social networking sites, which have transformed communication dynamics by offering innovative platforms for connecting with stakeholders, customers, and employees (Okonkwo & Awad, 2023). This shift has not only amplified brand recognition but also facilitated global interactions, as noted by Li et al. (2021). SNS platforms not only act as conduits for information dissemination but also foster idea sharing, facilitate relationship development, and increase user engagement. These collective findings underscore the critical link between effective communication strategies, trust development, and organizational success across diverse contexts and sectors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of social networking sites into communication strategies has notably transformed business productivity and professional interactions. By leveraging SNS, businesses can connect with their target audience in real-time, gather valuable insights into customer behavior and preferences, and enhance communication effectiveness (Ivanova et al., 2022). Moreover, SNS designed for universities have facilitated improved communication between students, fostering collaboration, idea exchange, and academic networking (Li et al., 2021). In political contexts, SNS have been instrumental in enhancing campaign messaging, mobilizing online activism, and gauging public sentiment, thereby enriching political communication strategies (Azeta et al., 2015). Despite the myriad benefits offered by social networking sites, it is important to acknowledge their potential impact on mental health and well-being. Businesses can mitigate negative consequences by promoting healthy usage practices and providing mental health support services to users (Ladogina et al., 2020). In

essence, the integration of SNS into communication practices presents a double-edged sword, offering immense opportunities for connectivity and engagement while necessitating careful management to ensure positive outcomes for individuals and organizations alike.

Anxiety/Uncertainty Management and Effective Communication

Effective communication is a multifaceted process that intersects with various theories and frameworks, including Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory derived from the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). Anxiety and Uncertainty Management theory focuses on managing uncertainty and anxiety during intercultural encounters, with mindful behaviors in domains like self-concept, motivation for interaction, reactions to strangers, social categorization of strangers, situational processes, connections with strangers, and ethical interactions facilitating reduced uncertainty and anxiety among interlocutors (Gudykunst, 2005).

The ability to recognize differences or predictability among community members is a sign of mindfulness. It makes people's perceptions of them more accurate. What is known about a person's response to strangers is largely based on earlier research by Neuliep (2015) that suggests a person cannot always be conscious when interacting due to a number of factors known as "superficial causes". In later years, it has been argued that mindfulness becomes particularly relevant as international mobility increases, necessitating an appreciation of cultural subtleties and the ability to manage emotions during cross-cultural encounters (Dey & Sharma, 2024).

Anxiety and uncertainty are not just emotional states as they significantly shape our interactions. When individuals experience lower anxiety and uncertainty, they tend to engage more openly and authentically with others. Recent research by Nadeem et al. (2023) explores the impact of anxiety, uncertainty, and mindfulness on intercultural communication effectiveness among international students in China during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially through virtual interactions. When individuals experience lower anxiety and uncertainty, they engage more openly and authentically with others. The study further reveals that anxiety and uncertainty indeed have a negative impact on intercultural communication effectiveness. Therefore, mindfulness plays a significant role in reducing anxiety and uncertainties.

Gudykunst (2005) emphasizes the critical role of anxiety and uncertainty management in fostering trust, empathy, and effective communication. A recent study by Sun et al. (2023) confirms this notion, revealing that five superficial causes significantly affect the management of uncertainty and anxiety within the AUM theory. This research also found that stronger self-concept, higher motivation to interact, positive reactions, higher levels of social categorization, and increased engagement in situational processes are all associated with better management of uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural interactions. These causes operate subtly but significantly, influencing how students navigate cross-cultural encounters. Recognizing and addressing these factors becomes essential for effective communication, especially in high-context cultures like Malaysia.

The integration of Anxiety and Uncertainty Management theory with URT further illuminates the role of communication in uncertainty reduction and management, particularly in initial relationship stages where uncertainty reduction is paramount. Acknowledging these natural responses allows individuals to navigate intercultural encounters more adeptly, ultimately improving interpersonal communication (Sun et al., 2023).

Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Through SNSs

A better explanation of how Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory relates to online interactions is achieved by combining the insights from AUM theory with the impact of social networking sites (SNS) on human communication and the unique context of Malaysia's SNS landscape. The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) serves as the foundation of AUM theory, emphasizing the management of anxiety and uncertainty in communication interactions, a concept highly relevant to technology-mediated communication (TMC) platforms such as SNS.

The internet, particularly platforms like Facebook and Instagram, has revolutionized communication by providing avenues for initiating and sustaining relationships. For instance, recent studies indicate that Instagram engagement, particularly problematic and passive usage, can exacerbate anxiety and depression through the mediation of appearance anxiety (Ryding et al., 2024). This contrasts with the protective role active Instagram usage can play against depression, especially when it involves direct communication, which fosters social connectedness and perceived support (Ryding et al., 2024).

Similarly, the study by Ostic et al. (2021) provides evidence of the dual impact of social media on psychological well-being. While social media use can foster social capital and emotional support, leading to enhanced well-being, it can also contribute to social isolation and smartphone addiction, which negatively affect psychological health. This duality underscores the need to manage online interactions carefully to mitigate anxiety and uncertainty.

In Malaysia, SNS usage is prevalent, especially among youths who spend significant amounts of time on these platforms (Jan et al., 2024). While excessive internet use raises concerns about addiction and its impact on social interaction and mental health, SNS also fosters social inclusion, supports social identity formation, and encourages collective actions within virtual communities. However, as Seabrook et al. (2016) highlight, the quality of interactions on SNS and the cognitive styles of users, such as rumination, significantly influence the relationship between SNS use and mental health outcomes like depression and anxiety.

The AUM theory's principles can be applied to understand how individuals navigate uncertainty and anxiety in their online interactions. For instance, in the Malaysian context, the superficial causes of AUM theory, such as social categorization and positive reactions to host interactions, have been shown to influence uncertainty and anxiety management among international students (Sun et al., 2023). These findings suggest that fostering positive intercultural interactions in online environments can mitigate uncertainty and anxiety, enhancing the overall well-being of users.

Moreover, gender differences in communication accommodation, as explored by MacIntyre (2019), reveal that women are more likely to experience anxiety and engage in convergence strategies during online interactions. These findings further underscore the importance of understanding contextual factors, such as gender and cultural background, in managing anxiety and uncertainty in virtual communities.

The Anxiety and Uncertainty Management theory (AUM) can help individuals and virtual communities navigate the challenges of social networking sites (SNS). By addressing issues like excessive internet use and leveraging SNS's potential for social inclusion, individuals and communities can effectively navigate the digital landscape, promoting positive communication outcomes and well-being. By applying AUM principles, individuals

and communities can enhance their online experiences and navigate the digital landscape more effectively.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and Survey Administration

The study employs a multi-stage cluster sampling methodology to gather data from a diverse group of youths in Malaysia aged 15 to 40 who frequently use social networking sites. The first stage involves grouping all states based on their geographical zones: Southern, Northern, Central, East Coast, and Borneo. Second, a representative state from each zone is selected. Third, two parliamentary or district areas are randomly chosen from each selected state, representing urban and rural settings. Fourth, a total of 100 SNS users from each area are then selected as respondents, resulting in a total of approximately 600 youths participating in the study. This sampling strategy aims to ensure representation from various regions and demographics for broader generalization (Sahharon et al., 2018). Such methodologies have proven effective in studies focused on social cohesion and youth engagement through virtual communities (Sahharon et al., 2023).

Purposive sampling is used to identify eligible respondents who meet the study's criteria, which includes being multi-ethnic and actively using SNS. According to official statistics (Statista Research Department, 2023), as of 2023, there are 70.1% Bumiputera, 22.6% Chinese, and 6.6% as Indians. The allocation of 100 respondents per zone is then proportionally sorted based on race and area, ensuring a balanced representation across different ethnicities and geographical locations. Once identified, eligible respondents are provided with a questionnaire to gather data relevant to the study's objectives.

Table 1: Ratio according to race and area.

Race	Area		TOTAL
	Urban	Rural	
Bumiputera	35	35	70
Chinese	12	12	24
Indian	3	3	6
Total	50	50	100

The study was conducted across the five main zones in Malaysia, encompassing both urban and rural areas, to understand anxiety and uncertainty management in intercultural communication. This diversity is crucial for understanding how different environments and backgrounds influence communication behaviors. A representative sample is essential for generalizability of the findings, as it ensures the conclusions are applicable to the broader population (Sahharon et al., 2018). The socioeconomic variability in urban and rural areas can impact access to resources, education, technology, and social networks, affecting anxiety and uncertainty management among youth. Including both areas allows the study to explore how cultural differences affect communication strategies, as well as anxiety and uncertainty management (Sahharon et al., 2023).

A comprehensive study that spans various zones provides a holistic understanding of the challenges and strategies related to intercultural communication among youth, considering the full spectrum of environmental and contextual factors. Findings from a geographically and demographically diverse sample can inform more effective and inclusive

policies and interventions, such as educational programs or communication strategies designed to improve intercultural communication. Including rural areas, which are often underrepresented in research, helps address potential inequalities in the understanding of communication dynamics, ensuring that the voices and experiences of rural youth are considered. By conducting the study across diverse zones, researchers can ensure their findings are robust, inclusive, and reflective of the entire youth population in Malaysia, making them more relevant for developing effective communication strategies and policies across different contexts (Sahharon et al., 2023).

Table 2: Multi-stage cluster sampling

Zone	State	Parliamentary Areas	Number of Respondents
Northern	Penang	Urban & Rural	100 selected respondents (50 respondents x 2 parliamentary areas)
Southern	Johor	Urban & Rural	100 selected respondents (50 respondents x 2 parliamentary areas)
East coast	Terengganu	Urban & Rural	100 selected respondents (50 respondents x 2 parliamentary areas)
Central	Selangor	Urban & Rural	100 selected respondents (50 respondents x 2 parliamentary areas)
Borneo	Sabah & Sarawak	Urban & Rural	200 selected respondents (50 respondents x 4 parliamentary areas)

Measures

The study employed a modified version of Whitaker's (2013) Anxiety and Uncertainty Management axiom grouping to measure Anxiety/Uncertainty Management and communication effectiveness (refer to Table 3). Whitaker's Anxiety and Uncertainty Management theory is a framework that focuses on how individuals manage anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural communication. The theory proposes several axioms, which can be grouped into different categories. These axioms address the core aspects of anxiety and uncertainty management. The threshold levels of anxiety and uncertainty are essential for effective communication. Predictive and explanatory uncertainty are also important in reducing uncertainty.

Self and other knowledge, including understanding one's communication style and cultural background, can help manage anxiety and uncertainty. Interpersonal and intergroup relationships, such as the quality and frequency of interactions with individuals from different cultural groups, can influence anxiety and uncertainty levels. Motivation to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds is crucial for managing anxiety and uncertainty. Communication efficacy, or belief in one's ability to communicate effectively, impacts how well anxiety and uncertainty are managed. Reducing reliance on stereotypes and negative social categorizations can help manage anxiety and uncertainty by promoting a more individualized understanding of others. By grouping the axioms, Whitaker's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management theory emphasizes the multifaceted nature of anxiety and uncertainty management in intercultural communication.

Previously, Gudykunst (2005) identified seven superficial causes that influence an individual's threshold of anxiety and uncertainty: personal/social identity, motivation to interact, reaction to others, social categorization of others, situational processes, connection to others, and ethical interactions. A total of 35 items were used to measure these seven

superficial causes, assessing a person's attitude towards managing their anxiety and uncertainty level. Additionally, 5 items were included to measure the level of communication effectiveness among virtual youth communities. Responses for each item were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with a high internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .926).

Table 3: Anxiety/uncertainty management and communication effectiveness

Superficial Causes	Number of Items	Definition
Personal/social identity	5	The way people view themselves and their view of the way in which they are perceived by the groups to which they belong.
Motivation to interact	5	People usually feel most secure during interactions with others when their self-concept and security needs are met, and their ability to envision how others will behave increases.
Reaction to others	5	Rigid attitudes may cause intolerance and intolerance causes people's expectations of interaction with others to be negative because they tend to perceive ambiguity and uncertainty as a threat for greater anxiety.
Social categorizations	7	People categorize others to bring order in their social environment to make sense of their reactions to others.
Situational processes	4	Situations as circumstances in which people employ scripts to provide them with cues or guides to action in various contexts.
Connection to others	6	Attraction or liking is a major contributor to people's desire to develop relationships with others.
Ethical interactions	3	An increase in an individual's sense of respect and moral inclusiveness towards others will reduce their level of anxiety
Communication effectiveness	5	An individual's ability to express themselves to others and their understanding towards others' culture and differences.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 22, including measures such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. A normality test was performed on the data distribution, revealing that the values fell within the acceptable range of +2 to -2 for skewness, and +7 to -7 for kurtosis indicating compliance with the rule of thumb for normality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The usage pattern of social networking sites among Malaysian youths reflects their years of experience and the frequency of SNS usage. According to Table 4, a significant majority (80.7%) of Malaysian youths have been using SNS for 11 to 20 years, with a smaller portion (18.7%) having more than 20 years of experience. On average, Malaysian youths have 8.39 years of experience using SNS. The most popularly downloaded and used SNS app among them is WhatsApp (n=296), followed closely by YouTube (n=273) and Instagram (n=248), while WeChat had the lowest downloads and usage (n=89).

Regarding the frequency of SNS app usage, respondents reported frequent openings of WhatsApp (M=17.27), Instagram (M=9.45), and YouTube (M=5.28). These numbers reflect a diverse usage pattern as each platform serves different purposes. WhatsApp is used for interpersonal communication, Instagram for visual interactions through comments and direct

messages (DMs), and YouTube for video content with comments and likes. On average, Malaysian youths spend less than an hour per session on SNS apps, with YouTube users spending the most time, followed by Facebook and Instagram. The time spent on chatting apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, and WeChat varies based on the number of friends and contacts, with an average of 13 minutes on WhatsApp, 5 minutes on Telegram, and 3 minutes on WeChat per session.

Table 4: Pattern of social networking sites usage

Indicator	Mean/Frequency	SD/Percentage
<i>Years of SNS Usage</i>	8.39	3.618
1-10 years	242	80.7%
11-20 years	56	18.7%
>20 years	2	0.7%
<i>Social Media Usage</i>		
Facebook	238	79.3%
Usage per time/day	4.90	7.493
Hours per usage/day	.45	.799
Minutes per usage/day	13.25	14.502
WhatsApp	296	98.7%
Usage per time/day	17.27	18.956
Hours per usage/day	.19	.527
Minutes per usage/day	13.15	11.325
Twitter	102	34.0
Usage per time/day	2.33	5.579
Hours per usage/day	.12	.389
Minutes per usage/day	4.06	9.048
WeChat	89	29.7%
Usage per time/day	2.15	7.600
Hours per usage/day	.05	.257
Minutes per usage/day	3.37	8.454
Instagram	248	82.7%
Usage per time/day	9.45	16.215
Hours per usage/day	.27	.550
Minutes per usage/day	12.89	13.248
Telegram	129	43.0%
Usage per time/day	1.78	4.319
Hours per usage/day	.09	.325
Minutes per usage/day	5.38	10.316
YouTube	273	91.0%
Usage per time/day	5.28	6.214
Hours per usage/day	.99	1.252
Minutes per usage/day	13.03	15.340

Based on the mean score of the eight aspects and the average classification of the seven-point scale, the overall assessment of anxiety and uncertainty management is determined. The percentages of all respondents for each level show how they managed their uncertainty and anxiety levels. While interacting with others in virtual communities, Malaysian youth were shown to have a moderate level of anxiety and uncertainty management (refer to Table 4). This research demonstrates how social networking sites can help virtual young communities control their anxiety and uncertainty levels.

Similar to a study by Gambo and Özad (2021), international students and the local community can communicate with less uncertainty thanks to social networking sites platforms. Social Networking Sites (SNSs) were found to reduce uncertainty. Through the application of a quantitative methodology, the study showed that the use of particular SNSs is positively correlated with lower levels of uncertainty. Based on the results, it can be concluded that overseas students use interactive, passive, and active strategies on these platforms to reduce the uncertainty that they and other students experience. Hence, by using a variety of engagement techniques, social networking sites play a crucial role in assisting users in managing communication problems, hence resulting in effective communication.

In addition to Gambo and Özad's (2021) claim that social networking sites can help international students communicate with less uncertainty, Ali et al. (2021) also found the wider effects of social networking sites on the relationships of youth. Their findings indicated that social networking sites generally promote positive relationships and social ties in academic, professional, and personal contexts. Their study found that social networking sites fosters understanding and acceptance among various cultural groups, despite worries about cultural shifts and the dangers of copying Western behaviors. These studies highlight the important role that social networking sites play in improving communication barriers and social interactions.

Table 4: Distribution of Malaysian youth by anxiety/uncertainty management level

Anxiety and Uncertainty Management Dimensions	Level by range			Overall Mean	Standard Deviation
	Low (1.00-3.00)	Moderate (3.01-5.00)	High (5.01- 7.00)		
Personal/social identity	39 (6.5%)	455 (75.8%)	106 (17.7%)	4.384	.875
Motivation to interact	32 (5.3%)	320 (53.3%)	248 (41.3%)	4.862	1.017
Reaction to others	41 (6.8%)	415 (69.2%)	144 (24.0%)	4.474	.908
Social categorizations	27 (4.5%)	381 (63.5%)	192 (32.0%)	4.635	.946
Situational processes	24 (4.0%)	361 (60.2%)	215 (35.8%)	4.780	.982
Connection to others	49 (8.2%)	393 (65.5%)	158 (26.3%)	4.492	1.001
Ethical interactions	25 (4.2%)	286 (47.7%)	289 (48.2%)	5.131	1.106
Communication effectiveness	24 (4.0%)	312 (52.0%)	264 (44.0%)	4.867	1.039
			Total	4.703	.984

The study reveals that rural youths in virtual communities have better anxiety and uncertainty management and communication effectiveness compared to urban youths. The research indicates that rural virtual youth communities have a stronger path coefficient than urban ones, indicating that when they manage their anxiety and uncertainty effectively, they tend to communicate more effectively than urban youths (refer to Table 5). Overall, the relationship between anxiety and uncertainty management and communication effectiveness varied significantly between local areas (rural vs. urban).

In order to evaluate the variation in the local area's path coefficients, the authors compared the bootstrapping result. When comparing the impact of anxiety and uncertainty management on social cohesion and communication effectiveness, rural virtual youth communities ($\beta = 0.782$) had a stronger path coefficient than urban virtual youth communities ($\beta = 0.596$). Hence, locality does matter, as evidenced by the findings that rural youths had a stronger path coefficient path than urban youths. This suggested that, in contrast to their urban counterparts, virtual youth communities in rural areas experience social cohesiveness and effective communication when their anxiety and uncertainty levels are well-managed. H3 and H4 are therefore supported.

Table 5: Bootstrapping results for path coefficient comparison of communication effectiveness and anxiety and uncertainty management between urban and rural areas

Relationship	Path Coefficients Original (Rural)	Path Coefficients Original (Urban)	STDEV (Rural)	STDEV (Urban)	t-Values (Rural)	t-Values (Urban)	p-Values (Rural)	p-Values (Urban)
Anxiety/ uncertainty management and Communication effectiveness	0.782	0.596	0.049	0.050	15.914	11.850	0.000	0.000

DISCUSSION

The findings from the analysis of Malaysian youths' social networking site (SNS) usage and Anxiety/Uncertainty Management levels provide valuable insights into their digital behaviors and communication strategies. The data reveals that a significant majority of Malaysian youths have extensive experience with SNS, with 80.7% using these platforms for 11 to 20 years, and 18.7% having more than 20 years of experience, reflecting a deep-rooted integration of digital communication into their daily lives. The average experience of Malaysian youths with SNS is 8.39 years.

WhatsApp emerges as the most popular SNS app among Malaysian youths, with 296 downloads, followed closely by YouTube (n=273) and Instagram (n=248). WeChat had the lowest downloads and usage, with only 89 downloads. This preference for WhatsApp is reflected in the high frequency of app openings reported by respondents, with an average of 17.27 times for WhatsApp, 9.45 times for Instagram, and 5.28 times for YouTube. Malaysian youths, on average, spend less than an hour per session on SNS apps, with YouTube users spending the most time, followed by Facebook and Instagram. The time spent on chatting apps like WhatsApp, Telegram, and WeChat varies based on the number of friends and

contacts, with an average of 13 minutes on WhatsApp, 5 minutes on Telegram, and 3 minutes on WeChat per session.

The Anxiety and Uncertainty Management assessment sheds light on how Malaysian youths manage anxiety and uncertainty in their communication processes. Across dimensions like personal/social identity, motivation to interact, reaction to others, social categorizations, situational processes, connection to others, and ethical interactions, the mean scores indicate moderate levels of Anxiety and Uncertainty Management. Specifically, for personal/social identity, the mean score is 4.384, motivation to interact is 4.862, reaction to others is 4.474, social categorizations are 4.635, situational processes are 4.780, connection to others is 4.492, ethical interactions are 5.131, and communication effectiveness is 4.867. These percentages and mean scores reveal a balanced approach to communication among Malaysian youths, where individuals navigate social interactions with a moderate level of anxiety and uncertainty, while also emphasizing ethical considerations in online communication.

Interestingly, the dimension of ethical interactions stands out with a higher mean score, indicating a stronger focus on ethical considerations in online communication among Malaysian youths. This reflects a growing awareness and emphasis on responsible digital behavior, contributing to a healthier online environment. Dan and Sannusi (2024) examined the spread of fake news during the COVID-19 pandemic and its significant mental health impact on social media users. They found that gratification, from both positive and negative actions on social media, motivates users to share posts, suggesting that the Malaysian youths' adept management of anxiety and uncertainty in digital communication could mitigate the mental health impacts. Overall, these findings underscore the complexity of digital communication behaviors among Malaysian youths, influenced by factors such as platform preferences, communication styles, and Anxiety and Uncertainty Management levels. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing targeted interventions and promoting positive digital engagement among youth populations.

The study reveals that rural youths in virtual communities have better anxiety and uncertainty management compared to urban youths, due to factors like tighter-knit communities, stronger social support systems, or different cultural dynamics. Similar to De Rycker and Jamal (2023) who studied the relationship between social media usage and feelings of loneliness among young Malaysian adults during the pandemic. Their findings showed no direct effect of social media on loneliness, suggesting that the strong social cohesion and communal lifestyles in rural areas, as found in this study, might buffer against loneliness despite high SNS usage. This aligns with the assertion that social media can foster positive relationships and reduce communication uncertainty among youths. This leads to higher communication effectiveness, as well as higher social cohesion in rural virtual communities. This is likely due to the closer social ties and communal lifestyle found in rural areas, which can enhance social cohesion and make online interactions more meaningful.

The significant variation between rural and urban areas underscores the importance of considering locality when examining the relationship between anxiety and uncertainty management and communication effectiveness. Bootstrapping results confirm that locality matters, with rural youths having a stronger path coefficient, indicating a more pronounced effect of well-managed anxiety and uncertainty on communication effectiveness compared to urban youths. Different environmental and social contexts influence how anxiety and uncertainty are managed and how effective communication is in virtual communities. Uran

et al. (2022) have previously discussed the role of social media in disseminating information during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting its effectiveness in raising awareness among university students. This supports this study's findings that social media can strengthen social ties and enhance communication effectiveness in different contexts. However, Uran et al. (2022) also highlighted the negative repercussions of false information, emphasizing the need for digital literacy and responsible social media use, which resonates with this study's findings on the importance of balanced and ethical SNS usage.

In the past, Salman and Pulungan (2017), and Kasmani et al. (2022) studies investigated self-disclosure on social media. Salman and Pulungan's (2017) study linked self-disclosure with the formation of friendships on Facebook, while Kasmani et al. (2022) found that self-disclosure levels and types influenced well-being among youths. These studies corroborate this study's findings that active engagement on SNS, facilitated by effective anxiety and uncertainty management, promotes positive social interactions and well-being among Malaysian youths. Overall, the results indicate that locality significantly moderates the relationship between anxiety and uncertainty management and communication effectiveness, suggesting that context-specific factors must be considered in understanding and improving virtual communication among youths. Future research could explore the underlying reasons for these differences, such as social support, community structure, access to resources, and cultural practices, to provide deeper insights into why rural youths manage anxiety and uncertainty better and communicate more effectively in virtual communities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study delves into the nuanced patterns of social networking site (SNS) usage among Malaysian youths and their corresponding Anxiety/Uncertainty Management levels in communication. The extensive experience of Malaysian youths with SNS platforms underscores the integral role of digital communication in their lives, with WhatsApp emerging as the most favored app for interpersonal interactions. The frequency of SNS app usage reflects a diverse usage pattern, with each platform serving distinct communication purposes. Malaysian youths spend a significant amount of time on SNS apps, particularly YouTube, which suggests a strong engagement with video content and visual interactions.

The assessment of Anxiety/Uncertainty Management levels indicates a moderate approach to communication among Malaysian youths. They exhibit a balanced understanding of personal/social identity, motivation to interact, reaction to others, social categorizations, situational processes, connection to others, ethical interactions, and communication effectiveness. Social networking sites significantly reduce communication uncertainty and foster positive relationships among youth. Active, passive, and interactive strategies on social networking sites help mitigate uncertainty and facilitate smoother communication.

Social networking sites can strengthen social ties and relationships in various contexts, including academic, professional, and personal environments. The study reveals that locality significantly impacts anxiety and uncertainty management and communication effectiveness among youths in virtual communities. Factors like community structure, social support, and cultural norms significantly influence how these issues are managed. Rural youths demonstrate better anxiety and uncertainty management compared to urban youths, possibly due to stronger social cohesion, tighter networks, and communal lifestyles. This leads to enhanced communication effectiveness, particularly among rural youths.

Addressing anxiety and uncertainty can significantly improve the quality of communication interactions in virtual settings, especially in rural contexts. Despite concerns about cultural changes and imitation of Western behaviors, social media promotes cultural integration and acceptance among different social and cultural groups. Guided use of social media can maximize its benefits, such as educational and moral development and fostering positive social values. However, awareness of potential cultural impacts and a balanced approach to its use is needed to avoid negative consequences. Overall, Malaysian youths demonstrate adeptness in managing anxiety and uncertainty in digital communication while upholding ethical considerations. This study offers valuable insights into the digital behaviors and communication strategies of Malaysian youths, highlighting their adaptability and engagement in the online social landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was funded by a University Research Grant Scheme (GPB/2017/9543200) from Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor.

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