

# TECHY LOLOS AND LOLAS GO ONLINE: FILIPINO SENIOR CITIZENS' USE OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this exploratory study is to provide qualitative data on how senior citizens (SC) use their online social networks. The ages of the SCs in this study range from 60 to 78 years old. Survey forms were given to 40 senior citizens. From the same sample, 20 participated in focused interviews. The data characterized the social networking of SCs based on important discussion points on identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation which are identified by James, et al. (2009) in their empirical study on New Digital Media ethics.

*Keywords: senior citizens, social networks, new media*

## **Introduction**

Social networking has been the busy avenue for many cultural exchanges (Thiruchelvam, 2011) and it is not just for kids and young adults anymore. The senior citizens (SCs) who qualified for this study are 60 years old and up. While senior citizens grew up with mass media – television, radio, print from the pre- and post-war period, digital media seems to have more impact on younger generations, making it a part of their lifestyle by default (Montgomery, 2002). Social networks however, which were primarily perceived to be the territory of the young, proved to serve the needs and interests of older people also.

In Japan, senior citizens were said to “to spend more time on TV, radio, and newspaper than the younger group” (Ohsako, 1998: 2). This difference was further highlighted in Buckingham’s 2000 book, *After the Death of Childhood*, where he attributed today’s generational differences to the Internet. In fact, this motivated Bayan Telecommunications to create the Lola Techie campaign for its DSL service (Lola Techie, 2007). This advertisement is famous for featuring ‘Grandma Techie’, a female senior citizen, who manages to participate in a variety

of activities online like social networking, games, etc. In addition, generational differences may have been augmented by the fact that senior citizens “find it harder to take on board new ideas and learn new skills” because they had grown accustomed to applying the skills they have learned before (Martin, 2009: 4). For this reason some claim the communication gap between generations has become wider.

Despite the digital divide, research done by PEW Internet show that social network users aged 50 years and older have increased from 22% in April of 2009 to 42% in May of 2010. Other findings in this research indicate that e-mail has been very useful to senior citizens for connecting with friends and relatives. The research also emphasizes that the Internet has been vital for senior citizens to get support and learn more about health maintenance (Madden, 2010).

### **Golden Boys and Girls Go Online**

The seniors in this study fall under the Baby Boomer Generation, which include those born from 1946 to 1962, and the Silent Generation, those born from 1925 to 1945 (McIntosh-Elkvins, et al., 2007). Martin (2009) affirms that, compared to younger people, fewer SCs get into social networks. Not surprisingly, many of the people diagnosed with Internet Addiction Disorder are teenagers. An increasing number of children and teenagers in the Philippines are addicted to the Internet. According to the Child psychiatrist Dr. Vanessa Cainghug, “a 2000 study on 18,000 Internet users under age 18 showed that 15 percent were in the process of becoming psychologically addicted.” She further adds that teenagers spend 14 hours a week online (de Leon, 2009). Since majority of these are studies focused on young people, there is a sizeable amount of untapped data on Filipino senior citizens’ social network use.

This research recognizes the increasing number of SCs online particularly those in social networks. Although there is a considerable amount of research done locally on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and Information Communication Technology (ICT), the samples used are mostly teenagers and young adults. ICT has prompted many researches in education because of its influence on student performance and its challenges to policy making in education (de Guzman and Fabian, 2008; Del Villar, 2009). On the other hand, a study done by Nepomuceno (2011) looks at the online self-presentation of ten Filipino adults on Facebook with ages ranging from 30 to 40. Because of the limited number of SCs on the Internet, there are comparatively few studies done on SCs’ Internet use (Fox, 2001).

The Philippines is in the top ten among the greatest number of Facebook users in the world. As of 5 September 2011, from a 727,924,640-strong global audience, 26,249,780 are from the Philippines. From that sum, 290,360 are 65 years old and above, while 430,160 are 55 to 64 years old, a number worth looking at

considering the Philippines was linked to the Internet only in March 1994 (Gonzalez, 2011; Maslog, 2007). To compare, based on the findings of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, the SCs only comprise 4% of the entire US Internet population while 81% of the population “who say they definitely will not go online are over 50” years old (Fox, 2001: 2).

Although Facebook has become very popular among social network users, this study explores all possible social networks of SCs, not just Facebook. To delineate, the study was borne out of the following premises deduced from the aforementioned literature: 1) social networks provide a means for SCs to make new friends and re-connect with old friends and relatives; 2) SCs can use social networks to learn more about their health, medicines and participate in online fora regarding these concerns; 3) social networks can serve as platforms for SCs to share their interests, expertise and rich experience to the public (Kavanaugh, 1999; Martin, 2009; Ohsako, 1998; Madden, 2010; Senior Citizens Expand, 2010); 4) social networks provide a leeway for SCs to “participate in and contribute to innovation processes taking place in present society” (Repetto and Trentin, 2008: 198).

Tuazon and Lopez (2007) recognize the important role of the Internet in keeping “Pinoy netizens” worldwide connected enabling them to engage in Philippine politics wherever they are. Albeit, they also highlight that only the upper and middle class income brackets can afford to have Internet access. Maslog (2007) further stresses that mostly people from the middle and upper SES can afford to buy computers. These are also the same people who can afford to go to school. Similar trends are reflected by several studies. In fact, socioeconomic status was seen to influence Internet use (Hargittai, 2007; Howard, et al., 2001; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007). In the Philippines, the location and socioeconomic factors affect Internet use because some people in the provinces are not as computer literate as those who live in the National Capital Region but that is changing fast (Parungao, 2011). Moreover, the research of Fox (2001) has shown that “seniors with the most online experience are college-educated, wealthy men who are more likely to have been introduced to the Internet at work” (“Wired Seniors: a breed apart”, 2001). It would seem far-fetched that senior citizens in the lower income brackets would endeavour to maintain an online social network account. The digital divide in the Philippines is not just between generations, it is also between the rich and the poor (Maslog, 2007).

### **Theoretical Inquiry**

Since related research on Filipino SCs’ use of social networks is quite sketchy, this research takes off as an exploratory study on how SCs use their social networks. In order to clearly describe the characteristics of the SCs’ social network use, the key points in the research of James, et al. (2009) were used as the study’s framework. These key points outlined in James, et al.’s framework were discussed

to provide a deeper perspective on social network use (Davis, et al., 2009; James, et al. 2009; Koo, 2011). This framework identifies five areas of interest on new media ethics which emerged from “theoretical insights from anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, political science, and sociology” (James, et al., 2009: 79) making it ideal for describing the social network use of SCs. These areas of interest are identity, privacy, credibility, authorship and ownership, and participation.

In the study of Repetto and Trentin (2008), frequency of Internet use is one of the factors used in understanding the extent of knowledge of social networks in ICTs. Frequency of Internet use yields interesting information when correlated with other demographic variables. In the study of Weiss (2006), data show that social networks with high school and post high school level of education use the Internet more frequently for communicating with others. One of the aims of this study is to discover how frequently SCs utilize social networks.

### **Identity**

Identity refers to how SCs portray themselves in their social networks which includes handling and perceiving self-expression online (Koo, 2011). Considering the affordances of CMC, one may “inspect, edit and revise” (Walther, Slovacek and Tidwell, 2001: 110) the identity presented online. Thus, the inquiry on SCs’ ethical stand on identity investigates if reconstruction of identities and making online identity different from offline identity are acceptable.

In relation to creating an identity online, the constructs of Erving Goffman and Mark Leary on self-presentation were used to further elaborate this process. Self-presentation is “the process by which people convey to others that they are a certain kind of person or possess certain characteristics” (Leary, 1996: 17). When joining social networks, at the least, people are asked to indicate their name, e-mail address, and sex. Depending on the nature of the social network, some details are essential. For example, to join Twitter, people should indicate their interests to know what “tweets” or posts to follow. In LinkedIn and Academia.edu, professional details are prioritized while social networks that do not cater to a specific social context contain a wide variety of optional profile details to fill-out. Details in people’s profile pages reveal how they package themselves online. Online self-presentation is static while face-to-face self-presentation is dynamic (Toma and Hancock, 2010). Compared to face-to-face interaction, self-presentation online is quite fluid and diverse that current theories covering it may not fully capture the intricacies of packaging one’s self online (Zarghooni, 2007). In other words, self-presentation online deals with impression management which includes the considerations one makes in writing about one’s appearance and uploading photographs (Leary, 1993; Toma and Hancock, 2010). On that note, the study inquires about the different ways SCs present themselves online. This includes their profile details and the materials they upload.

Zarghooni's 2007 study of self-presentation in Facebook applies four of Leary's 1996 four self-presentation tactics. The same tactics would be used to shed light on SCs' self-presentation online. These tactics are self-descriptions, attitude statements, nonverbal behaviours and social affiliations. To further operationalize these concepts, self-descriptions are the gamut of details SCs can use to create a desired impression in their social networks (Zarghooni, 2007). These details consist of interests, occupation, accomplishments, political, and religious affiliations (Leary, 1996). The study looked at the number of details SCs put in their social networks. The second one, attitude statements, would refer to the topics SCs choose to talk about. For Leary (1996), "attitudes we express influence the impression other people have on us" (p. 19). The three subcategories of the non-verbal behaviour – self-presentation tactic, physical appearance and emotion expressions – are utilized for this study. Physical appearance covers the photographs SCs choose to present themselves in Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). The data from the research of Walther, et al. (2001) on CMC show that physical attractiveness was negatively correlated with effective self-presentation. However, the researches of Nepomuceno (2011), Zarghooni (2007) and Toma and Hancock (2010) advocate that photographs are important vehicles for creating an idealized image. Since expression of emotions are very limited in a social network platform compared to face-to-face interaction, the expression tactics refer to means SCs resort to in expressing emotions. The subtleties of the third subcategory, gestures and movement, otherwise referred to as computer-mediated tactility in Zarghooni's study, were no longer included since majority of the respondents do not employ this tactic when expressing ideas and emotions. The fourth self-presentation tactic, social affiliations, looks at the importance SCs allocate to publicizing connections and groups in social networks.

### *Privacy*

Privacy is not black and white; it has many contexts and considerations. For the unsophisticated mind, it "can only mean something like keeping things secret" but privacy is beyond that (Grimmelmann, 2010: 4). In fact, one cannot expect privacy in social networks because all interactions are recorded (Dwyer, 2007). According to Boyd (2008), privacy is "a sense of control over information, the context where sharing takes place, and the audience who can gain access" (p. 7). Ultimately, privacy is all about being free to be yourself (Grimmelmann, 2010). This study looks at the privacy concerns of SCs such as classifying and managing intimate information and relationships in their social networks.

### *Trust*

Trust has always been an issue in virtual communities. For Gefen and Straub (2004), trust refers to beliefs on the integrity, ability and benevolence of the trusted other. James, et al. (2009) refer to trust or credibility as the integrity of the person in social networks. For this study, the focus is on how SCs establish their personal credibility online (Koo, 2011).

### **Authorship and Ownership**

Ethics addresses the much debated issue on authorship and ownership since there is poor regulation in protecting intellectual property rights in the virtual environment. Moreover, there is a surplus of information on the Internet which can be downloaded and mixed with other content (James, et al. 2008). Using these, the perspective of the SCs on intellectual property, downloading and mixing of downloaded materials is explored (Koo, 2011).

### ***Participation***

Good manners and right conduct may be perceived differently in online communities. In CMC, because of the fluidity of affordances present, responsible conduct may be defined and handled differently. James, et al. (2008) refer to participation as the “ego’s social relations, conduct, and membership in broader communities” (p. 12). Since full control becomes virtually impossible online, responsible conduct is tantamount to protecting one’s identity. On that note, the stand of SCs on the ethical implications of right conduct online was explored.

### **Research Methodology**

The ages of the SCs in this study ranged from 60 to 78 years old. The research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, survey forms were given out through an online survey tool, postal mail, and some are delivered to the SCs personally. The SCs were observed to ignore the online survey invitations. Moreover, after examining potential communities for this study, the author gathered that the youth from all income brackets can somehow access the Internet in their schools. The elderly from the lower SES, on the other hand, are likely to have no Internet access at home. This situation made random sampling unpromising for this type of study. After much deliberation on the sampling scheme, the author resorted to purposively selecting the SCs who were willing to participate, followed by snowball sampling after getting leads. The author contacted SC alumni from different colleges and universities in Metro Manila, specifically those who have social network accounts. Since not all SCs cater to social networking even if they have the means to do so, the author started searching for SCs on Facebook, Multiply, and in the schools’ alumni online social networking whenever available. Other respondents were referred by the SCs themselves who are active in social

networking. In effect, the respondents are all college graduates at least. The assurance that purposive sampling yielded valuable data were evident in the qualitative study on CMC (Rettie, 2009; Rosen, et al., 2010), in the qualitative and quantitative study of the preference of older persons on using the Internet (Weis, 2006); while snowball sampling presented meaningful data on the qualitative study of mobile social networks (Humphreys, 2010).

Forty SCs, 20 females and 20 males (mean age = 64.73, SD = 5.320), answered the survey questionnaires. The surveys were used to gather preliminary descriptive data on the SCs. These are done to see the trends behind the Filipino SCs' use of online social networks. Although the initial sample was selected purposively, followed by snowball sampling, the current locations of the SCs are quite dispersed. The National Capital Region (NCR) of the Philippines is well represented, with 6 SCs located in addition outside of the NCR. The survey was primarily used to sift the SCs who were willing to participate in the focused interview; hence, the second phase. The author conducted semi-structured focused interviews (at least 45 minutes long) to 20 SCs, 10 males and 10 females who took the survey. A number of them are still working. Some interviews took several meetings. At least two interviews were scheduled if the data needed to be substantiated. The interviews were conducted in venues most comfortable and convenient for the respondents like cafés near their residences. There were interviews done in some of the respondents' offices as well. Some respondents preferred to answer the questions through several online chat and email correspondences because of their busy schedules. Salient points from the interviews were noted down. The focused interviews centred on the "ethical fault lines" set down by James, et al. (2009) on new media ethics.

### **Research Findings**

Although the study is not limited to Facebook, very few respondents have Multiply, Twitter, LinkedIn, Academia.edu, and New Age social network accounts. Because of the limited number of responses on these other social networks, descriptive data was no longer derived from them. Due to its current popularity, all of the interviewees, along with those who answered the survey, have a Facebook account and when respondents have more than one social network, they check their Facebook accounts more than the rest. Explained by one male respondent, Louis, age 70: 'As a journalist we have to respond to questions about the media and usually these questions are coursed to Twitter and Facebook but as far as non media related things are concerned, I am more on Facebook'.

The data show that majority of the respondents who took the survey indicated that they regularly open their online social network accounts (See table 1).

**Table 1: Frequency of Social Network Use**

Frequency of Connection	Frequency	Percent
More than one connection a day	14	35%
One connection a day	14	35%
At least one connection every two or 3 days	12	30%
Total	40	100%

The identities of the SCs in the subsequent discussion are hidden via pseudonyms, some of which were suggested by the respondents themselves. Their real age and sex and are indicated with the pseudonyms. The following discussions are based on the 5 key challenges in new media enumerated by the Harvard University research team on the GoodPlay Project (Koo, 2011; Davis, et al., 2009; James, et al. 2009).

**Identity**

Self-expression and identity exploration are the key topics in this issue. For the respondents, social networks are not the appropriate platform for expressing one’s fears and anxieties. The salient points are documented in excerpts from the interviews below. The statements show that, unlike the youngsters in Monian’s 2006 study, the following SCs were not comfortable using their social networks as personal diaries.

- Louis – M 70: I express that in the same way that I am expressing all those in the old media, example when I write an essay or a report, it is the same except in twitter. You have to keep it short and you have to invent abbreviations.
- Betty – F 61: I say very little online. Just a one or two sentence liner will do.
- Sunflower – F 64: I do not really express myself, I just check on my friends and relatives, what they have to say, what they have posted, I do not say much, I only click “like” that is far as I go. I prefer email or sending private messages in Facebook
- Lady – F 65: A person who reads can perceive trite expressions from those that are fresh ones - whether originals or variations. I think twice before I express myself.
- Argee – F 60: I have some reservations when I say what I feel and think

Unlike other SCs, Jack, 62 years old, a college professor, is comfortable using his Facebook as a journal. For him, doing so is a way to connect to people:

‘My posts are borne out of my reading papers, novels, theses. I write them first in my notebook and then sometimes I post them. I posted recently, “The emotions in the work place are not due to the nature of the job but more on your relationship with others and day

to day activities". I want to relate to people who are undergoing the same and to a certain extent they react when they feel something about that'.

Some of the respondents have a penchant for using photographs or images to enhance the meanings in their messages. Like Joe, 78 years old, a stay-at-home grandfather, he is happy to occasionally upload photographs for his relatives to see. For business owner Lino, 69 years old, he said he does not express much on his Facebook and Multiply: 'my major interest in social networks is for my photo albums. Each album has an opening statement. So my opinions might be reflected in the albums.' For two SC housewife respondents, here are what they have to say:

- Serene – F 61: I express myself in my social networks by means of images in accordance to my thoughts. That's why when I comment, I put pictures, flowers. I put expressions at the bottom to reflect how I feel and think at the moment. Kung Happy Birthday, may happy birthday image dun. It depends on where you are posting. You have to post an image that fits the situation and then you express good thoughts for that person
- Simone – F 61: In starting an introductory comment or photo, I only take up matters of general interest of either my whole network or my selected group.

Out of 40 SCs in the survey, 14 said they use emoticons to express emotions while 12 said they use photographs like the interviewees above. For others, punctuation marks, especially exclamation points, effectively express how they feel. Very few SCs from the interviews and surveys use accepted acronyms, such as Laugh Out Loud (LOL) and Oh My God (OMG), to express emotions.

For retired history professor, Hector, male, 77 years old, he uses his Facebook and Multiply social networks to engage and provoke other people into critical thinking particularly on varied topics on Philippine history. However, Hector pointed out that he lets other people start the discussions. In his own words:

*Mas maganda kung merong diskusyon, palitang kuro online pero hindi ko sinisimulan yan, nangyayari lamang yan kung may nakikita akong komentaryo na dapat palawigin at iwasto. Pinoprovoke ko sila pag may nakikita akong malabong ideya para maliwanagan ang mga tao at para makapasok tayo sa loob ng pantayong pananaw at bagong kasaysayan.*

Translation:

It is better if there is an existing discussion online but I do not initiate that. The exchange only happens if I see a comment worth expounding and worth correcting. I provoke them [the people in my social network] whenever I see confusing ideas so that the people [in my social network] would be enlightened and enter the "from us for us perspective" and "new history" perspective (no direct translation).

He further stressed that, in his Facebook, he challenges those Filipinos who present their discourse in English:

*Sinasagot ko sila, "Maaari nyo bang isalin yan sa Filipino para maintindihan ko? Kung maintindihan ko yan, masisiguro ko na maintindihan mo rin yan."*

Translation:

I answer them, "Can you translate that in Filipino so that I would understand? If I can understand that, I assure you, you can also understand that too."

Hector preferred that people write in Filipino in their social networks and that social networks be used for the advancement of the Filipino way of life. He articulated: '*kailangan natin ang social networks para sa pagpapalaganap ng ating kabihasan at ng ating wika*'. Translation: We (Filipinos) need social networks to promote our way of life and our language.

Hector finds social networks useful for storing his PowerPoint presentation lectures and pictures but he asks his assistants to upload these for him. Like Hector, Lino uses his Facebook and Multiply pages to store his photographs:

Lino – M 69: My social networks are really all about the albums. I want to make my photos available to my friends and relatives. I upload my collection from 1960 to present. I have all kinds of photos, every tour, every event.

When asked about their perception on self-expression as being done by others, the following SCs advocate a more liberal stance on the issue.

Peter – M 60: Basically, I am a freedom of speech and any form of expression advocate online and offline. I don't make any judgments on what people say or do and they are free to do and say as they feel.

Whether they are making an impression or not isn't an issue.

Clifford – M 64: I usually say what I mean and mean what I say. I'm a very frank, sometimes, brutally frank person.

However, full time granddad Clifford mellows down when he feels that sympathy would be better appreciated: 'If I know he/she can take the heat, I go straight to the point and say my piece without reservation; on the other hand, if my gut feel tells me that that person needs an outlet, understanding and advice, I become softer in my approach and paint myself as someone who's always there to lend a helping hand.'

Majority of the SCs believe that expressing too much in social networks invites danger and could harm one's reputation. For businesswoman Betty, 61 years old: 'Less words, less mistakes'. The same is true for Ramne, 64 years old. For her, giving too much information about the self is dangerous. Data such as: 'one's address, out of town trips should not be uploaded anymore because these can be used for scams' (Ramne). Lino supports this stance strongly.

Lino – M 69: Expressing too much of themselves puts them in trouble because they go way beyond, they reveal too much of their emotions. Young people should be cautioned. There are many types of situations young people use social networks to go on blind dates and they end up in these sad experiences

On the other hand, there are those who live and let live as the expression goes. What matters is that they do not share intimate information or stir any negative emotions in their online interactions. 'I steer clear of "opening up my holy of holies" online, but OK for other people to do so, if that's how they feel' (Celtic Mom). Serene described her position philosophically: 'Whatever you express, you are your own thoughts and those things will come back to you'. While for Sunflower, it all depends on what people want: 'there are people who share almost everything about themselves, there are private people and there are voyeurs'.

Some SCs prefer to maintain a positive atmosphere and are repulsed by those who use social networks as their outlet for their political views and personal issues.

Ramne – F 64: Face-to-face social interaction is still important because there is no substitute for real interaction or socialization. Those who spend hours online neglect the real-reality.

Clifford – M 64: When you want to express yourself online, I expect your messages to be positive. Definitely not dour messages! If you're indulging in self-pity do you want people to commiserate with you? There's a channel to do that. Email your circle of family [sic] and friends but never wash dirty linen in public!

Simone – F 61: I do not like folks who are so political or so self-engrossed.

Hector – M 77: *Nasusuka ako pagnakakabasa ako ng mga sobrang pang personal na kumento, pag ginawa nila yan ng dalawa o tatlong beses, tinatangal ko sila. Ayoko ng ang mga trivial discussions.*

Translation:

I feel nauseated when I read comments that are too personal, whenever they do that more than once, I remove them. I do not like trivial discussions.

Louis expressed his irritation at how other people write in their social networks and compared it with how writing was done before: 'Some of them tend to be reckless, they do not pay attention to grammar, spelling, and mayroon mga name calling, recklessness. Sometimes they make invalid statements unlike in the old media where writing is done purposefully'. For Jack, the microblogging feature of Facebook should not be taken at face value:

Some are very impulsive. "What is in your mind" is taken literally in Facebook . When people read it they might read it three days after, the interpretation also is based on the moment of reading, therefore how you would react to it depends on that moment's emotion'.

All the interviewees stay away from trivial and negatively charged discussions. They agree that social networks are not a substitute for face-to-face interactions.

For teenagers, "trying out different ways of being" online is very appealing for them (Koo, 2010: 11). This inevitably leads to a variety of ways people can package themselves online. Many interviewed SCs however do not cater to that idea. Eliza, female, 60 years old, along with Serene and Joe, believe that there is no need for repackaging of one's self online and repackaging is like pretending to be somebody else. The following statements express the aversion of these SCs on the matter.

Bert – M 66: One has to be honest as possible in their presentation of themselves online. I do not like the idea of having too many identities online.

Clifford – M 64: I never thought of "repackaging" myself. What you see in [sic], hear from, read about me is what you get. Being yourself is honesty; trying to be what you're not is hypocrisy!

Some SCs are comfortable with the idea of exploring one's identity online because they are free to do so. For Argee, 60 years old, a stay home mom: 'Packaging and repackaging one's self endlessly all depends on one's self, how he/she would like others to perceive him/her... intellectual, casual, serious, cheesy, funny'. The same is true for Sunflower and Celtic Mom.

Sunflower – F 64: It depends on one's purpose, they are perfectly free to express themselves. If they want image enhancements, they have their reasons for doing so

Celtic Mom – F 64: I think social networking sites are good because they allow us to express ourselves in whatever way we want to. We are able to explore and ratify our personalities through our posts and other people's reactions.

On the other hand, some SCs, like Ramne, are neutral about the issue because they do not want to make it their problem. Lino likes to maintain an open mind.

I am not a very critical man; I take people as they are. It all depends on the individual if the individual needs to know more about him or herself through social networks, I cannot fault him or her for that, probably that is her way of finding out. I cannot judge people. There is no measure for judging people. You cannot just impose your own definition of morality.

Later, Celtic Mom, Lady, and Ramne reflected that many youngsters abuse this freedom. Some SCs emphasize that it is alright to stick with facts no matter how many details are indicated in one's profile.

Lino – M 69: I do not have any reason to package myself anymore. I show myself as I am. People keep telling me why I put my address, that people might take advantage of me, let them what the heck! My bio data is all there. I identify all my family members, all my grandchildren. They are all in Facebook, the young ones even.

Louis – M 70: I update my profile. I remove certain details but I do not change facts about me. I only update, when there are developments like I am retired, changes in my current connections, or at one point what films do you like. I change interest and hobbies, not the facts.

For both Lino and Louis, older people unlike teenagers do not have to explore their identities anymore. This affirmed Erikson's theory that identity formation is a crisis experienced by young people, particularly those in the adolescence stage (Erikson, 1968). "I have reached the pinnacle of my career and indeed what else is there to aspire for," Lino said smiling.

Jack has an interesting perspective on the idea of identity exploration.

Other people are being fake; some are sincere. The managed is the plastic while the genuine is the natural. Being genuine means doing away with filters just like being a kid again. But the world will not like that. Just like in the Emperor's New Clothes story, only a child can say the truth that he is not wearing anything but how many would want to hear the truth because the truth hurts.

Jack's statement insinuates that the "managed" types are those who package themselves in order to please others because they are not comfortable showing who they really are. In the interview, Jack said he wants to be genuine in all his online correspondences.

Hector was more concerned about the icons the youth are using as their profile pictures in social networks. He expressed his disappointment seeing young

people use the picture of Superman, for example, to be their profile picture. For him, this only goes to show that Filipinos have a weak sense of national identity.

Only data on Facebook profile details were analyzed statistically since all respondents have Facebook accounts. The data from the survey showed that all forty respondents indicated their sex and their name (the name that friends and family know) in their profile. Out of 40, 33 respondents indicated their birthday, 25 mentioned the schools they had attended, 24 specified their interests, 22 disclosed their current occupation and 21 stated their relationship status – more than half of them are married. For the SCs in this study, these are the anodyne details which can be shown readily online. On the other hand, regarding the least indicated details, 8 respondents wrote their complete address, 7 indicated their religion, 5 mentioned websites they are involved in, and 2 wrote their landlines. Only a few SCs in the sample agreed that these details are safe to publish online.

Although some SCs are comfortable with the idea that other people use their online social networks to construct an idealized persona for various reasons, they do not subscribe to this practice. Supporting this finding, the following results confirm how SCs show their physical appearance online: 31 SCs upload their recent photos, 25 upload pictures of them with friends, 14 upload pictures of them when they were younger, and 10 show their most flattering photographs. None of them use social icons or other peoples' pictures.

Using the concepts behind Leary and Kowalski's 1990 theory, the SCs apply a motivated approach towards their identity online where self-presentation is subject to the control of profile details that define which are safe to show online. In contrast, the study of Toma and Hancock (2010) shows that online daters resort to creating an image that is directed towards their desired goal. SCs are, therefore, not partial to the ostentatious display of reconstructed identities online.

Majority of the respondents who participated in the survey and focus interviews do not look at the social affiliations publicized by people in their online social networks. For those who occasionally check other people's social affiliations, Carl, a 62 year old male advertising and talent manager retiree, summed up the general vibe of the SC respondents in publicized social affiliations: 'There is sometimes an attempt to overload oneself with affiliations and groups, and these don't seem realistic'.

## Privacy

Setting the limits of information sharing online and defining what qualifies as intimate information are the important key points discussed under this issue. For most SCs they only share more information with their friends and relatives. Clifford emphasized: 'I know most of my Facebook friends like the palm of my hand'. Much of the information SCs have in their profile page are basic information. For Sunflower, basic information corresponds to 'what work I am

doing now, my current picture, my age, name, and my educational background'. Also, the respondents emphasized that they did not share very personal information. Celtic Mom elaborates on safe information: 'comments about the weather, events, news, issues, sports, posting links to interesting videos or articles, photos, nothing intimate, only small talk'.

For Louis, the sensitive information he does not share are 'details about your mate, fears and anxieties.' He said he only shares these with his friends through emails if needed be. Louis said he only uses his social networks to 'supplement old media' because, as a journalist, he uses his Twitter and Facebook account to upload his articles. The general rule in online communications is not to share intimate information and 'one should only talk about prosperity and good will messages, if you need to say negative things, better on the telephone' (Serene). The SCs agree that sensitive or intimate information are better communicated through emails and through the telephone. They further elaborated that telephone conversations offer the advantage to let bygones be bygones.

Others are more careful in what they put in their current status.

Ramne – F 64: I don't share personal information like where I'm going, what I did, personal thoughts (in Facebook status) except when greeting people on their birthdays. I send personal messages to reply to friends' inquiry about me and my family and topics that interest only us.

Lady – F 65: My fear is of unscrupulous elements using valuable information to do harm to my person and property. This is the worst case that can happen.

For Lino, intimate information pertains to his relationship with his wife which he does not share in his social networks. 'That is between her and me, that is one thing I do not tackle that online,' he professed. For Jack, the insights he shares online do not qualify as intimate information. He shares these freely even if they are too opinionated.

The SCs were quick to point out that they only trust their old friends and relatives with their sensitive details. Almost half of the interviewees said that they created social network accounts so that they can communicate with their children, other family members and old friends most specifically friends back in high school or college and from their previous workplaces. For some like Serene and Hector, there are matters that only friends will be able to relate to. For Hector, more friends and students engage in academic discourse with him. Hector added that friends and some relatives get updated with his current condition through social networks especially when he is sick. He even added that it was his student assistant who created his Facebook account for him but the write-ups are all his. Although most of the social networks of the SCs interviewed are kept exclusively for people they already know, 3 SCs are entertained by expanding their social networks to include new online friends, even those from abroad.

SCs see matters concerning the household and personal relationships to be sensitive information that should not be shared online. Most of them are uncomfortable with the idea that online friends are aware of their daily routine. They believe that this kind of information can be misused. Problems that arose from sensitive issues are better handled offline.

### **Credibility**

This portion tackles how SCs establish their credibility online as they participate in social networks. Most of the SCs never thought about this and they feel no pressing need to establish their credibility online. Despite the age gap, their statements below show similar points of view.

- Serene – F 61: Why do I have to do that? There is no need.
- Simone – F 61: Considering my network has established by either sanguinity or time, I am not motivated to establish an identity either than my true self.
- Sunflower – F 64: I do not need to actually, there is no reason for me to establish my credibility. I only communicate with friends who already know me there is no need for enhancing my credibility
- Lino – M 69: I do not exert any effort. I just put my bio data there. I think the bio data speaks for itself.

The statements above clearly show that the SCs reputation precedes their social network image. However, some SCs share how they establish their credibility in their social networks. For Eliza, using her real name in her social networks is one way to establish this: 'because I am not using an alias, they can always come back to me'. Because of his journalism background, Louis is more sensitive about the facts he writes online: 'verify what you want to say or what you are going to say first'. Journalists maintain their standards on credibility owing to the reputation of the alternative press that was instrumental to the toppling down of the Marcos dictatorship (Maslog, 2001). For Joe and Peter on the other hand, being consistent and truthful is how credibility is ascertained. Robert, a 60 year old retiree, added: 'I make sure my comments are factual, logical and witty'. Nonetheless, Betty warned that some people try so hard to establish their credibility that they say too many things online. But for her, the opposite is true.

For Jack, credibility is established from the kind of posts one has on his webpage. He implied that the postings one has in his or her social networks say a lot about the personality of the writer. In effect, he makes it a point to post messages with multiple layers of meaning. He compares his posts to an onion because onions have layers.

Generally, the interviewees believe credibility is tantamount to being true to oneself and that issue does not concern them. Most of them agree that

credibility is not something one can easily establish in social networks alone and credibility is made and is manifested more in offline communications.

## **Participation**

The issue here is about responsible conduct in social networks. The views intimated by the SCs on responsible conduct mirror their position on credibility and privacy issues. Betty and Bert asserted that responsible conduct is being conscientious, true and honest to friends online. The matter of being offensive gets mentioned several times afterwards. Joe emphasized: 'don't offend other people and don't use Facebook to air your grievances'. Ramne referred to ethics in journalism as basis: 'no offensive remarks or pieces about other people, even towards government officials, no smearing of reputation'.

So much of the views on right conduct online all boils down to one adage – the golden rule. Lino articulated this to be, 'do unto others what you want others to do unto you, and do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you'. But Lino believes this does not give him any reason to flatter individuals online just for the sake of flattery.

Among the SCs, only Jack, Peter, Louis and Hector do a lot of writing, although not necessarily blogs, on their social networks. In fact only Peter is active in blogging. He shared that he is aware of: 'how crooked people use Facebook to bully and publish everything because security is not good'. Peter finds his Facebook account useful for showing people the topics he cares to write about. He likes to share his views on the issues behind the Manila Bay dam, on how 'Americans exploit the world through deceit', and support for some public figures. For Louis, he uploads his columns in his social networks; while Hector and Jack write purposefully in their posts to set off people in their network to think critically. All four SCs agree that topics written by people online should be screened. Although Hector believes in freedom of speech, he asserted that there are proper online platforms for vulgar topics. On the other hand, Peter stressed the importance of using correct English or Filipino spelling when writing online. This is part of communicating virtuously along with: 'drawing conclusions fairly and responding to comments or reactions fairly'. Jack and Louis are more concerned about the impact on the public.

Louis – M 70: If you are sharing information that has public bearing through any medium, I think there should be an attendant responsibility because you have to think about the impact on the public. If there is no public bearing, you can do whatever you want.

Jack – M 62: You should be responsible on the impact you make on other people. The fact social networking is public means you want to impact on somebody's

thought so there is an attached responsibility on that, it is not as simple as posting. If you are not responsible, why do you post?

Social networks also serve as a tool for SCs, not only for self-expression, but also for contributing and participating in society. Louis stresses the important role of new media in forming opinions; such opinions can be very dangerous. Arnakim and Hamad (2010) study how new media affected the self-confidence of Muslims. Such propaganda online had contributed to Islamophobic sentiments. Aware of consequences of carelessness, the respondents advocate propriety in all communications on social networks. Their statements reflect that they are fully aware that online communications have repercussions whether good or bad. Reflecting on what the SCs have professed, they prefer not to send out careless agitating remarks to their friends and relatives online. If strongly opinionated remarks are sent out, they make sure these are done in good taste. Plus, they are vigilant about controlling hasty expressions online because these correspondences are open to the public.

### **Authorship and Ownership**

Intellectual property comes to the forefront as far as authorship and ownership are concerned. Majority of the SCs are aware of the issues behind intellectual property online. One of them, plagiarism, becomes so convenient because of the plethora of materials in the Internet. Some of the SCs interviewed are book authors themselves. Among them, Lino and Louis stressed the importance of attributing online sources. According to Louis, 'people should respect copyright and there should be attendant responsibility for people to be very aware of that'. Albeit, 'there are those information that are supposed to be in the public domain already like old photographs that you do not know who took them' (Lino). To be on the safe side, Lino just cites the URL where he got them. Hector gave another perspective on the issue. He said if downloading is a crime, then students steal his PowerPoint presentations from his Facebook and Multiply account all the time but that does not seem to bother him during the interview. For Hector, it is not a matter of dire urgency. He said the government should be the one to worry about people who recklessly download materials from the Internet because he cannot do anything about it. He just likes to enjoy social networking and not worry.

Peter, on the other hand, is somehow saddened by the issue on intellectual property online.

Other people's work must be safeguarded and credited if used. Attribution is important. Pseudo-intellectuals are those who use other people's work without crediting the author. This is such a sham!

With regard to photographs and other downloadable graphics, Serene shared a very simple solution.

I do not say what I download is mine. I get free images but everybody knows they are not my creations. If the pictures are free, they can be shared because there are pictures that have to be paid for.

Among the SCs interviewed, Peter is well acquainted with downloading items online. He downloads pictures from his social network for his PowerPoint presentations. He uses the Internet to aid his research writing but he makes sure that he acknowledges the sources.

Interestingly, two SCs are unsure about the whole idea of intellectual property online. 'No such thing! Everything on the platform is public property,' (Jack). Despite that standpoint, Jack only downloads email attachments and he does not even download pictures. 'I upload my pictures once in a while' (Jack). Celtic Mom never thought of the issue. She even asked if there is such a thing. She expressed that even if there is such a thing, it will be very hard to 'police the Internet'. Lady said something similar to what Celtic Mom mentioned. For Lady, 'intellectual property online would be hard to establish given the different points of view on the subject'.

Two SCs admitted that their digital competence still has to go a long way. Hence, they ask someone they trust to help them download materials. Clifford shared that he asks his kids to download 'stuff' for him. Hector, on the other hand, asks his trusty student assistants to help him upload his PowerPoint presentations.

The excerpts above show that SCs are aware of the copyright issues online. They are careful in citing their sources when they download documents and images from the Internet but their sentiments on the issue vary. Some heavily equate intellectual property violation to stealing while some just let it pass because these SCs assess that the laws that protect intellectual property online in the Philippines are not strictly imposed. This sentiment is also grounded on the experiences of many Filipinos with E-governance. Although many government agencies like the Government Social Security System (GSIS) and Social Security System (SSS) had put up their websites, "the quality and usefulness of these Web sites vary" (Maslog, 2007: 438). Along with that, E-Commerce and distance education are still minimal as the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has yet to implement guidelines on this (*ibid.*). Moreover, some SCs mention during the interview that their Internet connection at home is intermittent and they compare this with Internet connection to public libraries in other countries.

## Conclusion

Cyberspace is a significant communication environment for everyone regardless of age. Much of the studies done in the past were motivated by the curiosity and concern over the youth's experiences on the Net while the older segments of the population took a back seat, specifically in studies on social network interactions.

The purpose of this study was to provide a qualitative analysis of how SCs use their social networks. The SCs' perspective on social networks were qualitatively analyzed using the five core concepts – identity, privacy, ownership and authorship, credibility, and participation as discussed by James, et al. (2009). After analyzing the interview transcriptions, findings show that the SCs' use of their social networks is more for purposes of convenience and entertainment rather than for expressing “emerging beliefs, values, goals, and desired roles in society” as revealed by Buckingham's 2007 and Stern's 2007 study on adolescents online. Senior citizens' participation in online social networks signifies that they welcome change in their long-held perceptions of what it means to communicate. Studying how SCs use their social networks reveals the purpose of this social networking phenomenon for citizens in the third age and that purpose would close the virtual digital divide between generations. Technology should not be the impediment to challenging the “generation gap”; in fact, it should serve to recognize the interests of SCs in this age when “society is being transformed by the passage from the ‘solid’ to the ‘liquid’ phases of modernity” (Bauman, 2005: 303). Despite the different opinions of SCs and younger generations on social network use, SCs believe that social networks bring them closer to their children, grandchildren, old friends and other important people in their lives.

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