MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences

Go Boldly.

Exploring Digital Socialities:
Preliminary Results on Uses of Social and Mobile Media in Personal and Social Relations in Malaysia

Digital Ethnography Research Centre, RMIT
Melbourne
February 2016

Social and Economic Transformation in Asia

Dr Julian Hopkins
Monash University Malaysia
www.sass.monash.edu.my

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences

www.sass.monash.edu.my

Overview

- Polymedia
- Everyday uses
- Affordances
- Algorithmic Socialities
- Method Design and Methodology
- Results
- Discussion and Conclusions

Polymedia

- **'In conditions of polymedia the emphasis shifts from a focus on the qualities of each particular medium as a discrete technology, to an understanding of new media as an environment of affordances. As a consequence the primary concern shifts from an emphasis on the constraints imposed by each medium (often cost-related, but also shaped by specific qualities) to an emphasis upon the social and emotional consequences of choosing between those different media.' (Madianou & Miller 2013: 170).**
  - The media are defined in relation to the other media
- **'polymedia in effect helps to re-socialize the technology, since the responsibility of choice shifts from technical and economic, to moral, social and emotional concerns.' (Madianou & Miller 2013: 171)**
  - But don't forget the affordances

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

	USA	Malaysia
Internet use	85%	66.6%
Household broadband access	67%	72.2%*
Smartphone ownership amongst internet users	67%	74.3%
Use Facebook	72%	86.8%
Use Instagram	28%	30.3%
Use Messaging apps	36% (smartphone users)	81.1% (text communication via internet)

MCMC 2015a. *Communications & Multimedia. Pocket Book of Statistics Q2 2015*.
MCMC 2015b. *Internet Users Survey 2014*.
Pew Research Center 2015. *Mobile Messaging and Social Media - 2015*.
Pew Research Center 2015. *Home Broadband 2015*
** 'using results from ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals Survey from DOSM (% of households with broadband access) added with incremental percentage of households with broadband access, contribution from 1Malaysia Internet Centre and 1Malaysia Wireless Village.'*

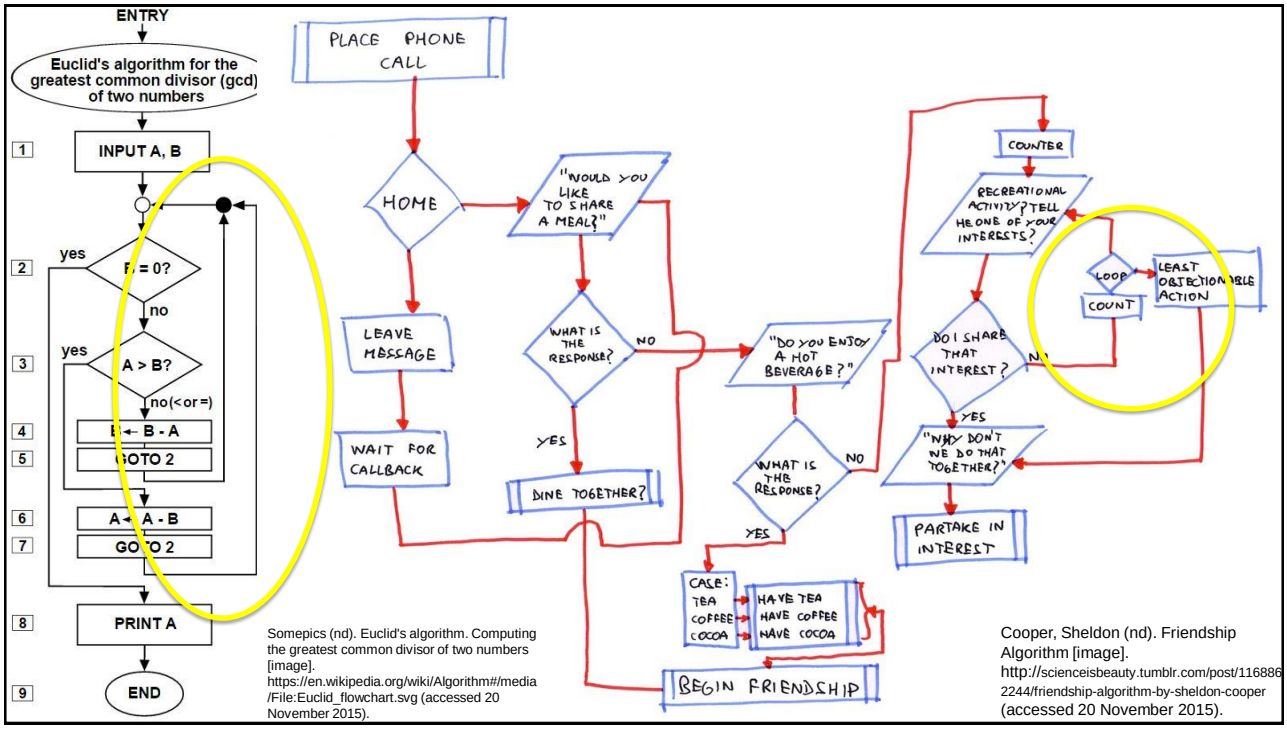
Everyday uses

- 'the Internet is becoming embedded in everyday life' (Wellman & Haythornthwaite 2002: 7)
- '"living in media" (Deuze et al., 2012) […] social life is lived in (rather than with) different forms of media practices and mediated interactions' (Madianou and Miller 2013: 174)
- Social and mobile media are becoming integral to people's interpersonal and social relations

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

Affordances

- Affordances limit as well as enable (Hutchby 2001)
- Directional 'potential exerts its own pull' (Graves 2007: 335).
- 'Engineering sociality […] Technology shapes sociality as much as sociality shapes technology – a process in which humans and machines have their own distinctive but mutually shaping roles.' (Van Dijk 2012: 5-6)
- 'mediation tries to capture the ways in which communications media transform social processes while being socially shaped themselves' (Silverstone 2005, cited in Madianou and Miller 2013: 174)



Somepics (nd). Euclid's algorithm. Computing the greatest common divisor of two numbers [image]. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algorithm#/media/File:Euclid_flowchart.svg (accessed 20 November 2015).

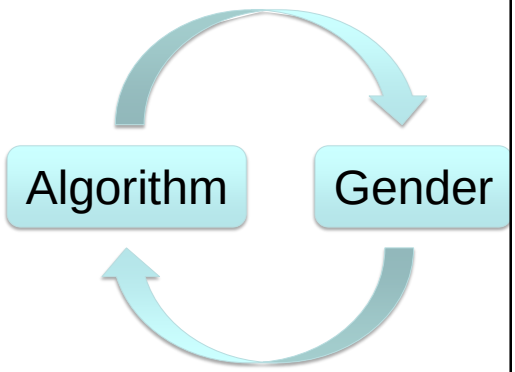
Cooper, Sheldon (nd). Friendship Algorithm [image]. http://scienceisbeauty.tumblr.com/post/116886224/friendship-algorithm-by-sheldon-cooper (accessed 20 November 2015).

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences

www.sass.monash.edu.my

Algorithmic Socialities

- **'Objects and events that confront us in the lifeworld are mapped onto a set of typifications: we experience them as mountains and stones, trees and animals, houses and machines, etc. (Schutz and Luckmann 1973, cited in Bakardjieva 2005: 39)**
- **Loops resemble the cognitive shortcuts that people commonly use in everyday life, based on their socialisation and personal experience.**
- **e.g. Facebook advertising and gender, cultural categorisations are brought to bear on the binary data stream.**



Algorithmic Socialities

Interpersonal interactions and related social practices are significantly impacted by the algorithms that underpin the ubiquitous social media and mobile platforms that enable mediated interpersonal and social interactions.

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

- **Algorithmic culture (Hallinan and Striphas 2015)**
  - –Filter bubble (Pariser 2011)

- **Algorithmic Socialities**

Algorithmic friendship

(Bucher 2012, 2013)

Method Design and Methodology

1. **How do Malaysian social media users perceive the role of social media, and other computer-mediated communication platforms, in the maintenance and development of relations with their family, friends, and other people in their lives?**
2. **What awareness is there amongst Malaysian social media users of the internet user personalised tracking carried out by commercial interests?**
3. **To what extent are Malaysian social media users likely to adjust the settings of their preferred platform with regard to managing their privacy?**

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

Method

- **Survey**
  - Challenges getting the response
  - Use of Facebook advertising
  - Snowball and convenience sample
  - 279 (includes 12 non-Malaysians)
  - Design for mobile platform
- **Focus groups unsuccessful – replaced by interviews**
  - 19 interviews in January 2016

A. Communicating with your *Close Family*

Which one of the following social media, mobile or internet communication platforms are you most likely to use for communicating with your *Close Family*? *

- Apple Messages
- Ask.fm
- Blogs (e.g. Blogspot, Wordpress, etc.)
- Email (Gmail, Outlook, Yahoo!, Hotmail, etc.)
- Facebook
- Facebook Messenger
- Flickr
- Google+
- Instagram
- Line
- LinkedIn
- Pinterest
- Says
- Skype
- SMS texting
- Snapchat
- Tagged
- Tumblr
- Twitter
- Viber
- Vine
- WeChat
- Weibo
- WhatsApp
- YouTube
- Other - None of the above

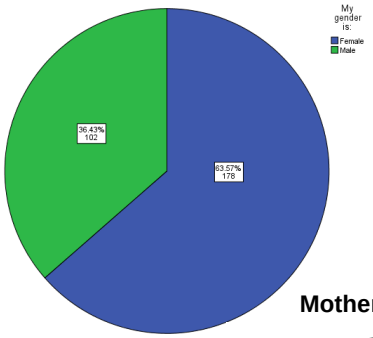
Everyday Uses of Social Media in Personal and Social Relations

A1. Below, there is a list of possible reasons why you may prefer to use WhatsApp for communicating with your *Close Family*.

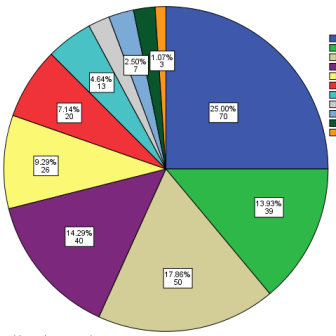
For each reason, please click along the scale to show how important it is to you. If it is not relevant, please select the 'Not relevant to me' option on the far right.

	Not important at all (1)	2	3	4	5	Very important (6)	Not relevant to me
I can share photos and/or videos *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can share interesting news and/or websites *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can share personal thoughts *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is a fun way to communicate *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can use fun emojis and/or stickers *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can stay in contact without much effort *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is important that we can easily contact each other at all times *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I want to choose when I can be contacted *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is good for communicating with people who are in another country and/or town *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is a safe and secure way to communicate *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is good for organising groups of people *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is cheap/free *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Gender

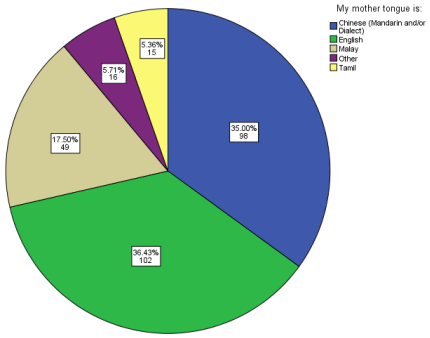


Age

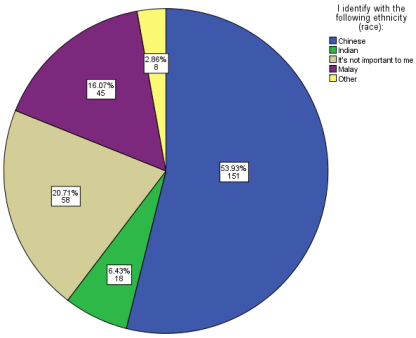


18-30	158	57%
31+	121	43%

Mother tongue

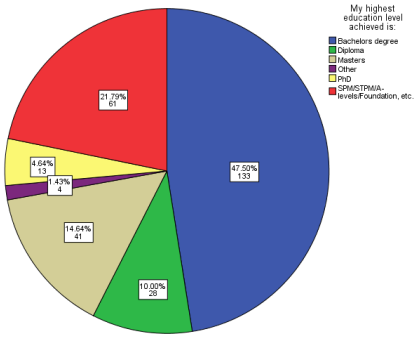


Ethnicity

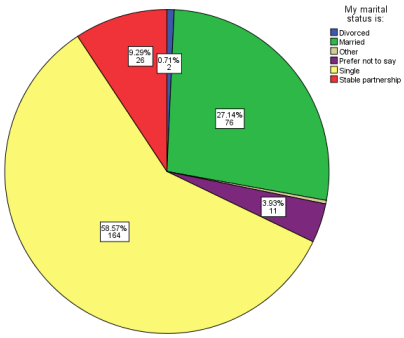


n = 279

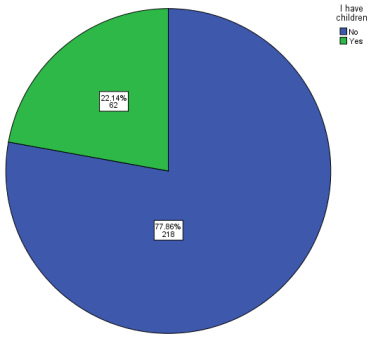
Education



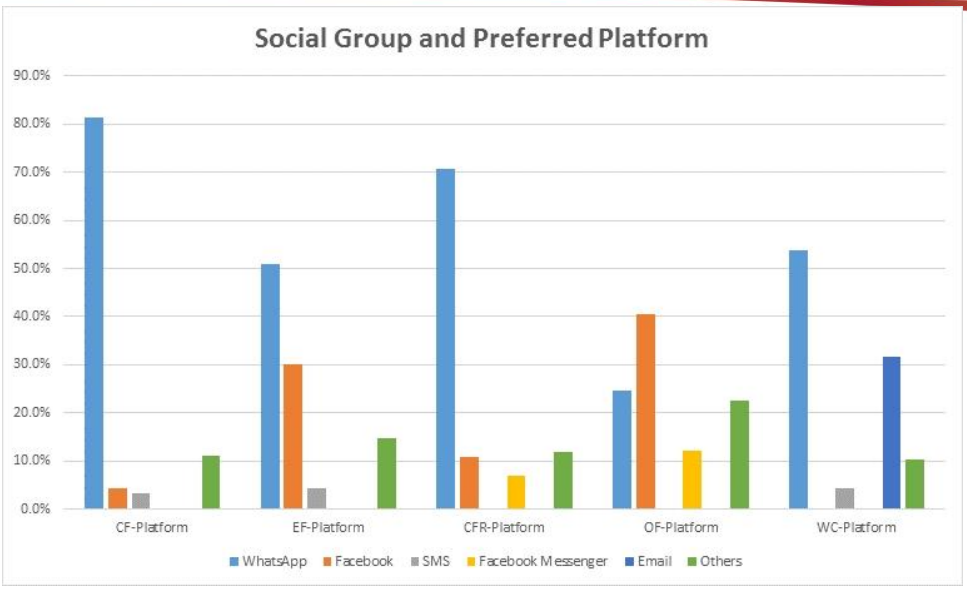
Marital Status



Children



n = 279



MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

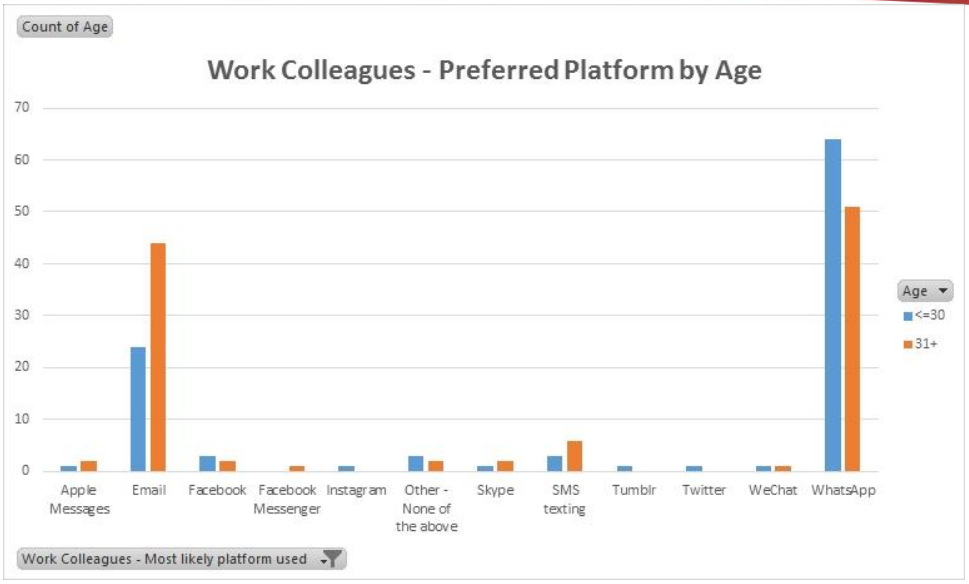
Algorithmic filters

Voice call
SMS
WhatsApp

Snapchat

Twitter … Facebook … Search … Tinder

Less → More



MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

Because in my line of work, a lot of my colleagues as well as my suppliers and agencies? **Uh…they love to communicate through WhatsApp, because it's more instant**. Emails is a bit slower, because not all of us access Emails through the phone. And for example, because in Marketing, if I'm going to be approving on an artwork, it's very easy for them to just take a screenshot or take an image and send it over WhatsApp for approval. Ah… **I know it's something not a lot of people like, especially if I have colleague who come from- especially from Western countries**, they don't get this whole idea of "why am I giving you approval across WhatsApp?" but I think it's a very- I'm not sure if it's an Asian thing, but it's a very local thing. **For me, in my area of work? Everyone is very used to doing that, getting approvals through WhatsApp. Even if you're in a meeting, they're sending you messages through WhatsApp and it's kind of like, expected as the norm**.

'Yeah…rarely… but **even my suppliers who are, for example, based in Hong Kong or Thailand, Singapore…they are quite used to this trend**. They're all on WhatsApp. When we come from meetings they're all like, **"Okay here's my number, you can WhatsApp me for anything, anytime."'**

Annabelle Ong, between jobs, 30yrs (emphasis added)

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences

www.sass.monash.edu.my

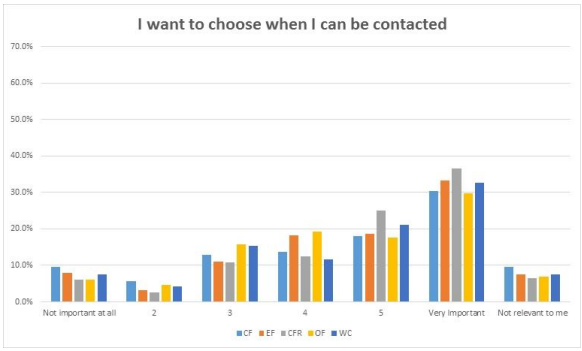
Workplace

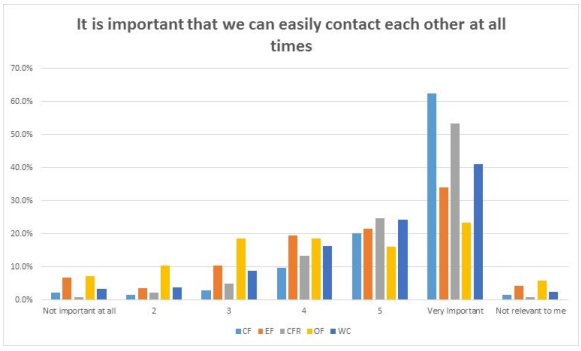
- **WhatsApp is common, but more likely amongst youth**
- **Workplace policies and practices are important**
- **Email**
  - More formal
  - Final documents
  - Larger files
- **Facebook is generally avoided**
  - Although it is commonly accessed – 'downtime'

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences

www.sass.monash.edu.my

Managing communication





- **Rainie & Wellman (2012) – larger networks are possible, but more work is needed to maintain them**

'Switching'

Oh. It's like, those who have my number are my Close Family or close friends. Those who are my juniors from my secondary school or those who are not really close to me? I prefer contacting them using Messenger. Facebook Messenger.

Faiza, Student, 25

Weak ties → Close ties

Facebook → WhatsApp → Phone call

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

there are people who I meet after like, **mainly musicians I meet once and y'know, I say "Yeah, let's keep in touch," and we become friends on Facebook**, that kind of friends as well. So they're a mixed bunch. Some of them are ex-colleagues, um…hmm. Yeah. Friends from school…

[…]

then how do you keep in contact? **The easiest way without sharing your number is by Facebook**, so we…we uh, like, I went to Langkawi Blues Festival 2 years ago. So we met this guy, so after that we become friends on Facebook. So the last visit is like two years later I actually meet him again and we go and listen to him

[…]

the 2nd meeting, I got his phone number

[…]

I used WhatsApp to thank him. A more personal message rather than on Facebook, that wouldn't have been appropriate, because it was something he did for us, very personally invited us the whole family back to his home

Susan Quah, public relations, 50 (emphasis added)

The Lowest Common Denominator

- **'one need not consider everyone when submitting content but only two groups: those for whom we seek to present an idealized front and those who may find this front problematic. […The latter] individuals define the *lowest common denominator* of what is normatively acceptable' (Hogan 2010: 383; original emphasis)**
- **WhatsApp is seen as more private and secure, in general**

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

So, in my mind, y'know, **I'm also constantly aware that whatever I post on Facebook. Um… I do have work friends there**. So, I think it's quite conscious that my subordinates do not make me their Friend and I do not make my boss my Friend. But I do have other…peers. So, um…there was a toss-up, at one point, when I wanted to go for Bersih. Right. There was no specific policy that says I cannot go. And then I had to decide if I was going to post, because it was something that was very close to me. And uh, in the end, I posted. **Because I posted the last Bersih, I know there were people around me who did not approve of me going for that**, but I think as long as I didn't really talk about it and then my Facebook is my personal…uh, thing, but I also realise that I would have to bear the consequences of, um, declaring my affiliation.

Susan Quah, public relations, 50 (emphasis added)

- **Using Facebook**
  - Most peruse rather than produce
  - Source of news, entertainment
  - Keeping in touch with weak ties

Choices oriented around family and technology

Yes, I stay with my parents. […] one of the reasons we did adopt WhatsApp is because my brother just went to study in Melbourne, so we want an easy way to keep in touch with him, so WhatsApp was the most feasible option.
[…]
Actually 2 years ago. […] we started it- because my father didn't have a smartphone, but um…my mom also had a pretty old one. But recently she got a new one, I gave my dad my old phone, now everybody has a smartphone so we decided to keep in touch that way.

Peter Lawrence, media professional, 27

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

WhatsApp and groups

I have 1 group where I like, once a week, there will be one um, sort of [religious] discussion. So they'll open up a topic and we'll discuss about things related to the topic.
[…]
You need to be online, so you just read read read and let's say if somebody ask the question, if you know the answer or you have your own opinion, you just reply.

Faiza, student, 25

- **Different family groups**
- **Church groups**
- **Friend groups**
- **Ad-hoc groups**
- **Ignored groups**

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences

www.sass.monash.edu.my

Awareness of algorithms

- **Varying degrees of awareness of some mechanism that controls what appears in the news feed**
- **Some dissatisfaction, by mostly acceptance**
  - Exception: one respondent used his own art to displace pictures of himself
- **General lack of knowledge of the detail of privacy controls**
  - 'too complicated'

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences

www.sass.monash.edu.my

Um…well, I know that popular posts get pushed to the News Feed more, posts that have a lot of Likes and a lot of Comments. And um…I'm not so sure, but it sometimes has to do with the amount of interaction I have with certain people. I have friends who've I've logged over 50,000 messages with over Messenger, and I tend to see what they post? Some of them I've marked with a Star, the Close Friends function? Which will give me a Notification when they post something. So I think those will appear more. I'm not sure exactly how it works though.
[…]
one of the cases was someone else was using my computer one day, and he…opened some site for something he was looking into and then it started showing me ads from that. I said, "Nope, not interested in this."

Peter Lawrence, media professional, 27

I think we could sort it according to time, or it's like, getting a lot of comments. If one of your friends posted, and if they're getting like more response from others, then it'll be on top.
[…]
Normally like if it receive a lot of comments or likes, then it'll be on top of my news feed.

Faiza, student, 25

Awareness of remarketing

- **Many reported examples, but most felt like it was an inevitable part of the service**
- **A minority expressed an interest in removing the service**
- **On the phone, it's more difficult to control**

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

I think I went onto Agoda or something, because I was travelling and I wanted to look for hotels and whatnot. And I realised after I logged off, **suddenly I was seeing that ad following me**. Like on Facebook I'd see it'll be the exact same location I was going to, and I was like, "What the heck was this?" At that point- **at that time I felt very violated. Why were they doing? And I thought it's like, two different platforms, how were you following me through all this and it's quite bad**. I personally went into that website, I knew what I was looking for. The fact that I left, I had left because of a reason, maybe I already found something or it just wasn't right, I was going to buy it somewhere else, and then following me like throughout my entire journey and kept popping up really frequently, **it was really annoying for me**, yeah.

[…]

But on the other hand **I also keep it logged in because its easier for me**, because it's already- for example if I'm already logged into my Google account and that's obviously linked to my Email, YouTube and whatnot, so the moment I go onto YouTube, like the few channels that I follow, the recommendation, it's already there so it's easy for me. **So the ads are just a side thing**.

Annabelle Ong, between jobs, 30yrs (emphasis added)

No more social media

I think it's easier to lose touch with people who move out from the location-wise. I mean, are physically further away from you. That's definitely harder. Uh…but I think in some ways also it's a bit less stressful? Because you're not always on. You're not always - people don't expect you to always be contactable at any time of the day.

Annabelle Ong, in between jobs, 30

I think you feel very isolated.

Susan Quah, public relations, 50

We still make it a point to see each other when we can. We still make it a point to meet up with each other when we can. Yup. The Internet has just made it easier for us to plan when we're gonna do that. But we still will end up doing it.

Peter Lawrence, media professional, 27

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

Discussion and Conclusions
Algorithmic socialities? Digital socialities?

- **Polymedia describes an environment, but the practices are socialities, and the mechanisms of socialities are affordances**
- **A preference for WhatsApp for respondents' stronger ties**
- **Facebook and other platforms are more likely to be used for weaker ties.**
- **Greater diversity of social media used by the younger group.**

Discussion and Conclusions
Algorithmic socialities? Digital socialities?

- **Everyday mediated interpersonal relations are here to stay**
- **WhatsApp is mostly devoid of algorithms in terms of the interface**
- **Micro-coordination and 'connected presence' (Ling 2012)**
- **'Communicative affordances' (Schrock 2015)**
- **Social network sites and exhibitions (Ellison and boyd 2013, Hogan 2010) – less relevant for closer ties**

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

So What?

- **Algorithmic filtering may be less powerful than assumed**
- **'the political promise of social media may never be realized' (Duncan 2016)**
  - But what about the 'filter bubble'?
- **Reinforcing of 'traditional' social ties – more bowling?**
  - Neighbourhoods, schools, interest groups
- **Comparative – why is there less use of messaging in the USA, and what does it mean?**
  - Is it only that they are all using SMS?
  - Should research group messaging and social media together?

References

- BAKARDJIEVA, M. 2005. *Internet Society: The Internet in Everyday Life*. London: SAGE.
- BUCHER, T. 2012. Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. *New Media & Society* 14, 1164–1180 (available on-line: *http://nms.sagepub.com/content/14/7/1164.abstract*, accessed 20 September 2014).
- ———— 2013. The Friendship Assemblage: Investigating Programmed Sociality on Facebook. *Television & New Media* 14, 479–493 (available on-line: *http://tvn.sagepub.com/content/14/6/479.abstract*, accessed 5 October 2013).
- DIJK, J. VAN 2012. *The Network Society*. SAGE.
- DUGGAN, M. 2015. *Mobile Messaging and Social Media - 2015*. Pew Research Center (available on-line: *http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/19/mobile-messaging-and-social-media-2015/*, accessed 23 February 2016).

MONASH University
Arts and Social Sciences
www.sass.monash.edu.my

References

- DUNCAN, F. 2016. So long social media: the kids are opting out of the online public square. *The Conversation*, 2 February (available on-line: *http://theconversation.com/so-long-social-media-the-kids-are-opting-out-of-the-online-public-square-53274*, accessed 16 February 2016).
- GRAVES, L. 2007. The Affordances of Blogging: A Case Study in Culture and Technological Effects. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31, 331–346 (available on-line: *http://jci.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/31/4/331*, accessed 28 April 2008).
- HALLINAN, B. & T. STRIPHAS 2014. Recommended for you: The Netflix Prize and the production of algorithmic culture. *New Media & Society* 1461444814538646 (available on-line: *http://nms.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/02/02/1461444814538646*, accessed 23 November 2015).
- HOGAN, B. 2010. The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 30, 377 –386 (available on-line: *http://bst.sagepub.com/content/30/6/377.abstract*, accessed 20 December 2010).
- HORRIGAN, J. B. & M. DUGGAN 2015. *Home Broadband 2015*. Pew Research Center (available on-line: *http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/12/21/2015/Home-Broadband-2015/*, accessed 23 February 2016).
- HUTCHBY, I. 2001. Technologies, Texts and Affordances. *Sociology* 35, 441 –456.
- MADIANOU, M. & D. MILLER 2013. Polymedia: Towards a new theory of digital media in interpersonal communication. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, 169–187 (available on-line: *http://ics.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.monash.edu.au/content/16/2/169*, accessed 5 January 2016).

References

- MCMC 2014. *Communications & Multimedia. Pocket Book of Statistics Q1 2014*. Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (available on-line: *http://www.skmm.gov.my/Resources/Statistics/Communications-and-Multimedia-Pocket-Book-of-Stati.aspx*, accessed 25 August 2014).
- ———— 2015a. *Communications & Multimedia. Pocket Book of Statistics Q2 2015*. Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (available on-line: *http://www.skmm.gov.my/Resources/Statistics/Communications-and-Multimedia-Pocket-Book-of-Stati.aspx*, accessed 15 October 2015).
- ———— 2015b. *Internet Users Survey 2014*. Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (available on-line: *http://www.skmm.gov.my/Resources/Statistics/Internet-users-survey/Internet-Users-Survey-2014.aspx*, accessed 15 October 2015).
- PARISER, E. 2011. *The Filter Bubble. What the Internet Is Hiding From You.* New York: The Penguin Press.
- RAINIE, L. & B. WELLMAN 2012. *Networked: The New Social Operating System*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- WELLMAN, B. & C. HAYTHORNTHWAITE 2002. *The Internet in everyday life*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.