

# Behavioural Dynamics of Teenagers Exposed to Social Media: A Case Based Enquiry of Indian Youth

Nilofer Hussaini<sup>1</sup>, Budha Anuradha<sup>2</sup>, Sachin K.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Christ (Deemed to be) University, Central Campus, Hosur Main Road, Bengaluru-560029, India

<sup>1</sup>nilofer.hussaini@christuniversity.in, <sup>2</sup>budha.anuradha@christuniversity.in, <sup>3</sup>sachin.kothamasa@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

In a world which speaks the language of diversity, we have come to see the formation of a united front of individuals under the broad umbrella of popular culture. A lot of credit to this united front ought to go the presence of social media. As in the case of formation of any group, there does exist a social influence which alters the behavioural norms of the individuals of a group. However, the formation of like-minded phenomena which is stimulated through the social media not only has human behaviour induced influence but also has a lot of simulated artificial influence which has made the lives of people seem, superficially inter-linked. An influence which is that strong in nature, must surely be put under intense analysis and that is exactly what this research paper aims to do. It aims to reiterate through analysis the nature of ideas simulated in the minds of the teenagers when it comes to emotional feelings and reactions in terms of propaganda which is being smeared around on social media and aims to interpret the reactions of the teenagers due to the simulation of the artificial influence which evidently and importantly has an impact on the dopamine-receptors of every user of social media. The research paper aims to be a product study of the techno-psychological perspective and also aims to elucidate the needed transition in the mindsets of the teenagers of the popular culture.

## Keywords

Cyber-Psychology, Interdependence, Group Behaviour, Social Media Users, Behavioural Psychology, techno-psychological perspective, Social Theory

Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020

## Introduction

Humans as social animals, have for a long time, disputed lives and states on the basis of difference in ideology, but now we live in an era which seems as though the whole plausibility of effective herd mentality is on the run as it has evidently become easier to acquire customers and individuals for the support of a product or a party as a whole through social media, and this in return has a wide spread cognitive effect on the humans which is probably the reason for the rise in majoritarianism. This research paper aims to elucidate the said cognitive effect and scrutinize the same.

To set a premise for this very idea it becomes imperative to illustrate the point on why this stands true. A former Mozilla and Jawbone employee reported to BBC that "It's as if they're taking behavioural cocaine and just sprinkling it all over your interface and that's the thing that keeps you like coming back and back and back" when asked about the addictive algorithms of the online companies. It must be noted that this said quote is not coming from any other individual but the very person who ideated the concept of 'Infinite Scroll' which is a feature of apps which makes the apps user to cognitively form habits by the usage of social media apps. (Andersson, 2018)

He also further went on to tell BBC that if one does not catch up with their impulses they go on and on to use the said app or a website for a longer time. Given the Cookie tracking algorithm of the webpages, Recommendation algorithm of YouTube and many other websites and apps it is very evident for a fact that humans, if they do not pay much attention, they become a prey to the social media platforms as the sole intention of these platforms is to retain the attention of the people who are on it.

In a document published by PWC titled 'Whom do consumers really trust?' (Brewster, Moore, An, & Campbell, 2018) it is duly noted that Social networks are the biggest source of inspiration for consumer purchases with 37% of consumers finding purchase inspiration through the channel. It is also evident by the reports of EMarketer (US Social Media Users, By Generations, 2019, 2019) that 90.4% of Millennials, 77.5% of Generation X, and 48.2% of Baby Boomers are active social media users. It is also embedded that Generation Z follows up in the race as well.

With the above given precedent, it is pretty much clear that social media platforms are by inception very addictive in nature and is also one of the mediums which are highly used but the sole intention of this paper is not to shed light on how addictive social media is but on what happens after the social media's 'addictive' feature kicks in, in the sociological and behavioural factors of human beings.

The research paper as elucidated in the abstract shall focus on the impact social media has on political ideologies or any nature of ideologies for that matter and shall entail the said effect of group cohesiveness of social media.

The key point objectives are: -

- Shed light on the 'Peer Pressure Effect': - Sigmund Freud famously called peer pressure effect as 'Group Mind' illustrating the fact that peer pressure is of sorts a mentality which is pervasive in a group. As far as ideology is concerned firstly it must be noted for an underlying fact that ideologies exist due to group acceptance. Communism exists due to acceptance of the same by the communists. That being said, it is safe to also say that the whole plausibility of group mind effect can persist on social media as an interpretation of social media platforms such as twitter or Instagram is nothing but a group of individuals sharing ideas and motives online. So, this paper will try to shed light

on the ideological effect of peer pressure on social media and how the ideologies formed through social media is an anomaly from a natural ideology formation.

- **Qualitatively theorise the impacts of the effect:** - The effect of social media as a whole is not essentially easy to quantify but can be in the forefront explained through theories on why certain aspects of ideologies and products/services are well accepted and why certain ideologies are not and are hindered through external pressure and why the same can be made increasingly accepted through cultures like meme trends.

Thus, this paper aims to qualitatively theorise on what impacts of this effect can be seen through trends.

- **Behavioural insights of the effect:** - Another major rationale of this paper is to shed light on the human behavioural impacts which are not only clearly evident but also embedded subliminally in the users of social media. These behavioural insights will be in the form of theories in clear distinction and relevance to the current day social media dynamics.

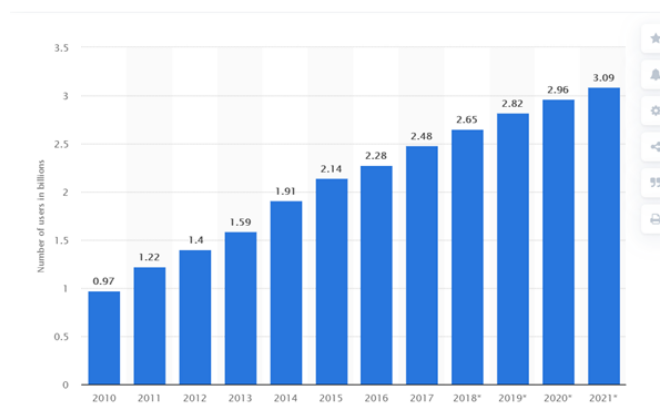
- **Relevance of the effect:** - The paper also aims to quantify the urgent need to address the relevance of the effect as it has dire significance on the functioning of democracy or any form of cumulative political selection and suggestion through bringing in examples of how daily life scenarios which show the power of social media in creating a trend of objective and effective mind set about people and things and how it can bear fruit in bringing about changes in the target object.

At the onset it is imperative to elucidate that the research paper is an observational product study on teenagers using social media. The whole reason the choice of the target group to be teenagers is firstly because of the reason that comparatively a larger chunk of Generation Z and Millennials are actively part of social media and secondly because they have the power and choice to make influential decisions. (Note: - Even though Millennials are not teenagers they have a significant impact on the social lives of Gen Z on social media platforms and it is fair to assume, that the behavioural norms will remain similar in nature besides the age of the user because of the all-pervasive peer effect which is present.)

The significance of social media is only good to shed light on the peer pressure effect if there is significant activity of the target sample on the internet.

As it was already reiterated that social media platforms have proven to be significantly influential in retaining users it is imperative to understand what activities users indulge in on social media.

As of a study conducted by Statista (Clement, 2019) it is shown that the number of social media users will certainly increase positively in the following years. This is mainly due to the rapid globalisation and the inception of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

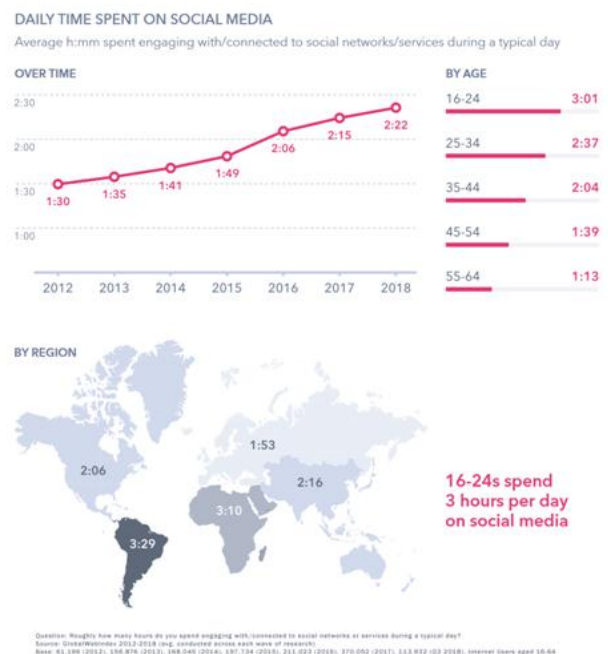


**Figure 1:** - Shows the surveyed Active users of social media (till 2017) and the expected growth (2018-2021)

After ascertaining the number of active users on social media platforms it becomes essential to establish how much of their time do people spend on the platforms to indicate the impact of the social media peer pressure effect.

According to a survey conducted by Statista (in 2017 which is the most recent year's data available) an average individual spent 135 minutes on social media alone and it was projected that the number of minutes would only rise to 153 minutes in 2019.

Another study (Salim, How Much Time Do You Spend On Social Media? Research Says 142 minutes per day, 2019) reveals that social media usage has risen tremendously as the country which uses the most of social media (i.e. the Philippines) showed that the average usage rose by 11 minutes.

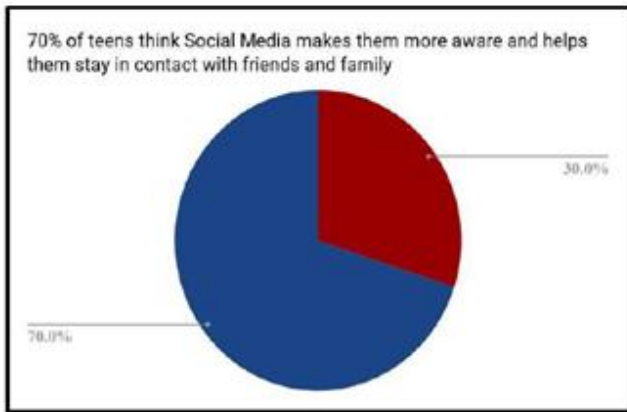


**Figure 2:** - Social Media Usage infographic from Digital information world

The notable feature from the infographic (refer fig. 2) is that the average usage of a teenager was 3 hours.

It is noteworthy that usage of social media is not necessarily spent on the most diversified form (i.e. more than three

social media platforms) as it was clearly stated in the introduction of this research paper that due to the addictive loop nature which is instilled in every social media platform it is more plausible that a person indulges most of his time in not more than 3 social media platforms(refer fig.3)



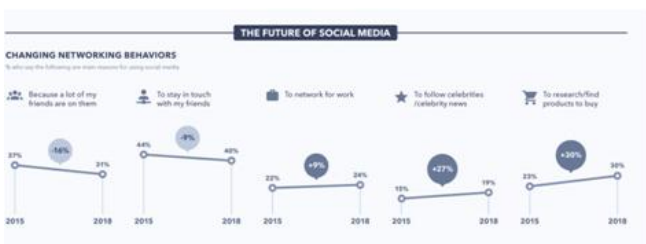
**Figure 3:** - TCS Gen Y study on the perception of Social Media

The source of awareness and information for most of the teenagers is from social media platforms which clearly gives scope for people to learn things from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube rather than any other source.

This can be further analysed from a study conducted by Global Web Index (Viens, 2019) which showed the following trends.



**Fig 4:** - Global Web Index statistic (Z indicating Gen Z, M indicating Millennials, X indicating Gen X and B indicating Baby Boomers)



**Figure 5:** - Global Web Index Changing Networking Behaviours.

As it is pretty evident that (refer to fig.5) social media is now less of a social interaction platform and more of a social productivity enhancing platform as it is clearly used to seek information be it from celebrities, to research or to network for work, it involves high density of exchange and interaction based on information.

This by face gives the scope for adulteration of the information which is being circulated on social media platforms and less introspection of the same as, social media platforms are not very idealistic for research, debate and

celebrity interaction because it is monologued in nature and has adverse effects on how data is received, perceived, interpreted and spread across social media.

This very idea can be further elucidated by the following theories which are going to be proposed.(refer to fig. 6)



**Figure 6:** Ideologies relating to peer pressure on social media (theories proposed by this paper)

These theories try to shed light on the after effect of peer pressure on social media which leads to very erratic and widespread trends of behaviour amidst people. These will be further co-related with a real-life case study.

- **Theory of Instant Gratification:** - Theory of instant gratification proposes to state that individuals on social media crave to get their satisfaction by ready-made data or information which at first hand does not austere the user to search for more information and helps them remain sated as far as the information comes to him/her in their habitual routine.

Example: - Memes are a highly trending way of humour and information, so any spread of facts and figures through memes is more likely to be accepted by the community without further research or fact check.

This behavioural trait of social media users sheds light to larger behavioural biases and traits.

At the forefront, the theory of instant gratification insinuates that the ‘Disfluency Effect’ (Lehmann, 12 November 2015) has a toll on the information consumed by the social media users. As previously stated, it has become a habitual norm for people to consume data through social data but such data does not necessarily help in the retention of the information. Disfluency effect in humans show that only when people austere their working memory load will they have better analytical and elaborative reasoning but such will not be the case of normal data consumed through social media.

Yet another bias that the theory of instant gratification would fuel is the Availability Heuristic (Kahneman, 1973) of individuals as in common notion any news which is seen by a social media user can be associated with a real life incident and then be cross-judged to a preconceived notion, this will be further explained in the theory of thought appropriation.

- **Theory of Shareability:** - Theory of Shareability proposes to state that individuals on social media have the high urge to share their real-life experiences, thoughts and opinions through their uploads and get their proposed level of satisfaction from the same. This is the main reason of everlasting trends on fashion and memes.

Example 1: - When a person comes across an aesthetic/eventful/extreme emotional situation in his or her life, it is more likely for him or her to upload it as their story.

Example 2: - A recent trend of people sharing their views on a particular incident will enable an urge in the person to do the same.

Example 3: - The crave to share any little epiphany or thought-provoking ideas is more in individuals and acts as an urge for further reciprocation.

This theory as a whole tries to shed light on the trait of social media users to gain social acceptance by showing or portraying themselves to be a part of something in the view of getting social reciprocation. This effect, in its existence leads to an 'endorsement factor' which makes every social media user to consciously or sub-consciously categorise what is worthy to be shared on social media. This factor can be further explored to be used for increasing brand loyalty and brand advocates of organisations.

- **Theory of Socio-Dependency:** - Theory of Socio-Dependency Proposes to state that people have less diversification of their sources of information on social media platforms and hence turn to depend on their habitual routinely source of information through their social media followings. This creates the problem of algorithm-based feed reviews which might not necessarily prioritise rightfulness of information over the trend of acceptance.

Example: - It is more likely for a person to accept the news provided to him on any social media account rather than for him to go and read about it on a different platform.

This theory, gives light to propensities of being manipulated by algorithm-based feed, as when a certain news which is of significance is portrayed repeatedly by few of the accounts being followed by an individual it is more likely for the user to accept it as the information is presented. Any reluctance to further delve on the topic would leave a mark of impression on certain perspective which is endorsed by the followings of the user.

- **Theory of Thought Appropriation :-** Theory of Thought Appropriation proposes to state that people tend to appropriate their inceptual thought on a particular issue based on the growing trends of social media buzz or talks of the same issue leading to an effect called 'Introspection loss' which in practice works on lines with the herd mentality and lack of further introspection of the opinion over appropriation of it to match the multitude.

Example: - A point of view on a subject is more likely to be appropriate to a similar well-formed point of view but not necessarily the same. Leading to scope of falsification. (Opinions on the recent trending topic of Citizen Amendment Bill)

The theory of thought appropriation is one of the vital findings of this paper as it encompasses itself amidst various behavioural biases of individuals.

Firstly, it has its impact on Availability Heuristic (Kahneman, 1973), when certain information is presented on

the net and you already have certain preconceived notions about that particular subject it is more likely for you to appropriate your thoughts according to your past experience. For example, one might have an experience that Muslims have been indulging in terrorism and when they are presented with news relating to that very religious sect being involved in some horrendous activity, it becomes likely for them to associate that, that piece of news might be true without indulging in further research or introspection.

Secondly, the bias of belief perseverance as proposed by (Festinger, 1957) is further elated by the theory of thought appropriation, that is, it is more likely that an individual would persevere to fulfil whatever notion he or she has by the information which is provided to him by social media and thereby arrive at conclusions through a bias.

Thirdly, there are high chances of confirmation bias to be in play as well, a person will search for or interpret situations in his favour and indulge in falsifying his or her point of views.

Lastly, availability cascade would have a high chance of presenting itself in the process of thought appropriation to look for situations which well fit a person's situation and it might also be one of the reasons why people tend to make fake news so it is easily appropriated and it becomes an ugly vicious cycle of false acceptance.

- **Theory of Forceful Repetitiveness:** - Theory of Forceful repetitiveness proposes to state that any trend which is repeated over and over again leads to blind acceptance as in the case of mass advertising and reiteration of a lie over and over again in the real world becomes circumstantially acceptable. This can be closely linked with the reiteration of certain subjects on social media over a period of time.

This theory also has aspects of the Framing effect (Tversky.A, 1981) as when a certain information is endorsed by multiple people it would have a framing effect to be true or real and a tendency of people to belief in that proposition.

- **Theory of Reality Mismatch:** - Theory of Reality Mismatch proposes to say that the interpretation of behaviour of people on social media can be deceptive in nature and in course of time also be misinterpreted in accordance to the favour of interpreter allowing to accept and acknowledge behaviour out of context to be solidified as the actual behaviour of the individual.

This is because of the sense that people have the tendency to be ostentatious on social media and not be their true self. Such portrayal can affect social relations of individuals.

### Method:

The case study adopted in this study practically relates to the circumstances which have happened in the past on social media in India. Based on cases, the above-mentioned theories are identified and justification to portray the credibility of the theories is presented.

### Utsav Chakraborty Case of False #MeToo

Utsav Chakraborty is a comedian who was associated with the well-established comical brand AIB, he fell prey to be guilty as a certain Mahima Kukreja (@agirlofherwords) called him out during the #MeToo trend on Twitter to have

sexually abused people online by sending unsolicited genital pictures to multiple people online. She, standing in the forefront posted screenshots of multiple women who have undergone the sexual abuse by Utsav Chakraborty, one such tweet is of the one dated on 04 November 2018 at 12:21pm which portrayed that a 'young girl' had been abused by him online on her personal number. However, it was later clarified by the person (@kanikakaul22) who was claimed to be abused that it was her mistake of not recalling that she herself had given the number to him and they had exchanged perfunctory replies to stories here and there and it was her memory lapses which made her share the incident with Mahima Kukreja online and she went on to apologise for her false narrative. However, this apology happened 2 years after the real calling out of the comedian and in the heat of the #MeToo trend a lot of people shared the said narrative without any due diligence believing the tweets to be totally accurate which caused the downfall of the comedian's reputation and career.

### Misconception of Snapchat and Snapdeal

On April 17 2017, people on India went out to boycott Snapchat on the pretext of unverified comments made by their CEO Evan Spiegel as a report quoted that one of the former employees of the company stated that "Their app is for rich people, he (CEO) was not interested in expanding his business to poor countries like India and Spain."

This so stated comment enraged people to channelize their anger by evidently calling out Snapchat on social media and boycotting it. This was coupled along with the Boycott of Snapdeal as a few people assumed it to be Snapdeal instead of snapchat and they underwent circumstantial damage for the same.

### Findings:

The case Utsav Chakraborty Case of False #MeToo shows the working of four of the concepts, Theory of Shareability, Thought Appropriation Reality Mismatch and the concept of Forceful Repetitiveness. Mahima Kukreja called out the comedian due to the lapse of their relationship outrightly on social media. It shows the functioning of the Theory of Shareability to get over her crave to share her frustration and other emotions online. The combination of concept of Thought Appropriation and the concept of Forceful Repetitiveness is the reason of the continuance of the trend and no proper introspection of the same. The concept of Reality Mismatch sheds light on the behaviour of Kanika Kaul to have impulsively shared something online on a lighter perspective but to have been interpreted in a totally different way. (Deodhar & Manral, 2019)(Chakraborty, 2019)

The case Misconception of Snapchat and Snapdeal at hand clearly shows the portrayal of the concept of Socio-dependency as people clearly believed only the news of hate against Snapdeal without probing into the matter and due to the lack of diversification of their news they rightly believed the trend they saw. This also signifies the concept of Instant Gratification where people had to gratify their urge to show their disapproval of the statement and went on to boycott the companies and of Forceful Repetitiveness which helped in

the sustainment of the trend. (Netizens mistakenly uninstall Snapdeal app instead of Snapchat , 2017)

### Conclusion

The findings of this paper are mainly the theory proposed which can also be further reviewed on the cases of: -

1. Tweets of Kevin Hart in relations of him being the host for Academy Awards,
2. Twitter trends of U.S Elections and
3. CAA and NRC trend in India.

The paper also set out to find that social media plays an imperative role in shaping the ideologies in the minds of people and it is a matter of concern as the ideas shaped through social media are not healthy as it can be easily deceived or influenced due to the working of the theories and biases of Instant Gratification, Thought Appropriation, Socio-dependency, Forceful Repetitiveness and Reality Mismatch which are the Theories proposed directly by the author of this research paper.

These theories can also be used for the benefit of digital marketing regimes. For instance, the theory of shareability can be used by digital marketers to endorse the product more effectively and also position their products better by using the aspects of the theory of thought appropriation.

These theories have the potential to be further researched as separate papers by itself, and for that very reason, this paper will remain as a preliminary research paper

### References

- [1] Andersson, H. (2018, July 4). Social media apps are 'deliberately' addictive to users. Retrieved from BBC News Website : <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-44640959>
- [2] Brewster, M., Moore, C.-L., An, L., & Campbell, C. (2018). Global Consumer Insights Survey 2018; Whom do consumers really trust? . Retrieved from PWC website : <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/retail-consumer/assets/consumer-trust-global-consumer-insights-survey.pdf>
- [3] Chakraborty, U. (2019, November 2019). Twitter. @Wootsaw. Retrieved from Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Wootsaw/status/1197466305495846913?s=19>
- [4] Clement, J. (2019, August 14). Daily time spent on social networking by internet users worldwide from 2012 to 2018(in minutes). Retrieved from statista: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>

- [5] Deodhar, N., & Manral, A. (2019, November 25). As Utsav Chakraborty calls #MeToo allegations 'fabricated'; Mahima Kukreja says he needs to own up, apologise. Retrieved from First Post: <https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/a-s-utsav-chakraborty-calls-metoo-allegations-fabricated-mahima-kukreja-says-he-needs-to-own-up-apologise-7697521.html>
- [6] Festinger, L. (1957). A theory of cognitive dissonance. Stanford University Press.
- [7] Jan H. Kietzmann, K. H. (2011). Social Media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media . Kelley School of Business, Indiana University.: Elsevier Inc.
- [8] Kahneman, T. &. (1973). Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability. Department of Psychology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel.: Elsevier Inc.
- [9] Lehmann, J. G. (12 November 2015). Working memory capacity and disfluency effect: an aptitude-treatment-interaction study. Metacognition Learning.
- [10] Netizens mistakenly uninstall Snapdeal app instead of Snapchat . (2017, April 17). Retrieved from Economic Times : <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/netizens-muninstall-snapdeal-app-instead-of-snapchat/articleshow/58210180.cms?from=mdr>
- [11] Salim, S. (2019, January 4). How Much Time Do You Spend On Social Media? Research Says 142 minutes per day. Retrieved from Digital Information Wolrd : <https://www.digitalinformationworld.com/2019/01/how-much-time-do-people-spend-social-media-infographic.html>
- [12] Salim, S. (n.d.). How Much Time Do You Spend On Social Media/.
- [13] Singh Bhati, V., & Bansal, J. (2019). Social Media and Indian Youth. Indore: International Journal of Computer Sciences and Engineering.
- [14] Survey, T. (2015). TCS GenY Survey 2014-15. Retrieved from Tata Consultancy Services Website : <https://www.tcs.com/content/dam/tcs/pdf/discover-tcs/about-us/events/TCS-GenY-Survey-2014-15.pdf>
- [15] Tversky, A., K. D. (1981). The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice. SCIENCE.
- [16] US Social Media Users, By Generations, 2019 . (2019). Retrieved from E Marketer: <https://www.emarketer.com/chart/226029/us-social-media-users-by-generation-2019-of-population>
- [17] Viens, A. (2019, October 2). This graph tells us who's using social media the most. Retrieved from World Economic Forum : <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/10/social-media-use-by-generation/>