Understanding Internet User Profiles: A Case Study of Thailand

Donyaprueth Krairit
Graduate School of Business Administration
National Institute of Development Administration
Bangkok, Thailand
donya.nida@gmail.com

***Abstract*—Thailand is experiencing the unforeseen growth in Internet penetration like in many developing countries. Internet users are eager to go online and try our new applications. In order to understand the whole picture of the market, it is important for one to understand the user behaviors first. This study aims to analyze the Internet user behaviors, using Thailand as a case study, and group the users according to their usage behaviors. The findings show four groups of Internet users which are different from traditional literature which has not been updated since 2012. They are, namely, (1) Online Hardcores, (2) Rational Users, (3) Social Addicts, and (4) Social Followers. These groups have different behaviors when it comes to the usage of different applications on the Internet. It is found that most Thai users use social network applications and short messaging services, such as Line and Whatsapp. Therefore, the majority tend to be the socializers. However, it was found that Thai users often use many applications in one day. They do not stay only on social networks but also use other programs as well. The results also show that Internet users grouping is still the area that can be further developed as the users and applications keep changing.**

***Index Terms*— Internet users, User profiles, E-Business**

I. INTRODUCTION

Thailand has experienced a steady growth of internet penetration where number of internet users has almost doubled in 5 years between 2011 and 2016. The internet penetration in Thailand has reached 42.70% in 2016, where 29.1 million out of its 68.1 million populations are connected to internet, mainly via mobile phones. This is driven mainly by the high mobile penetration rate, coupling with the recent trends of rapid decline in price of mobile data package and availability of smartphones at more affordable prices during the past few years, effectively lowering the barrier for internet adoption. On the other hand, the growing popularity of social network applications also attracts people to connect to internet, e.g. Facebook and LINE.

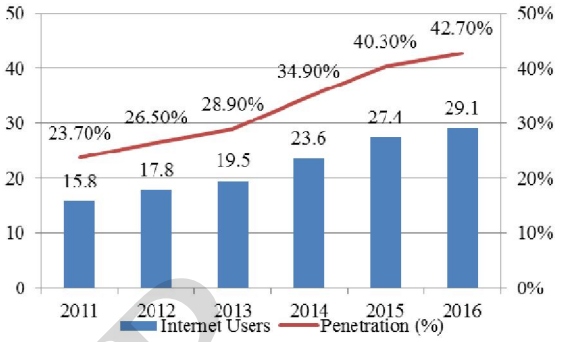


Fig 1. Internet user growth and penetration in Thailand, 2011-2016

Today, Thailand is already leading other nations when it comes to online activities on mobile phones. It is reported that Thai people spend approximately 4.2 hours per day on mobile phone, while spending only 2.6 hours and 1.5 hours on TV and computer respectively. The fact that mobile phones are carried by user almost everywhere, not only leads to user spending more time on it, but apparently leads to more intensive use of internet on daily basis. It is reported that 86% of internet users access internet services on daily basis, while another 11% access internet services at least once a week.

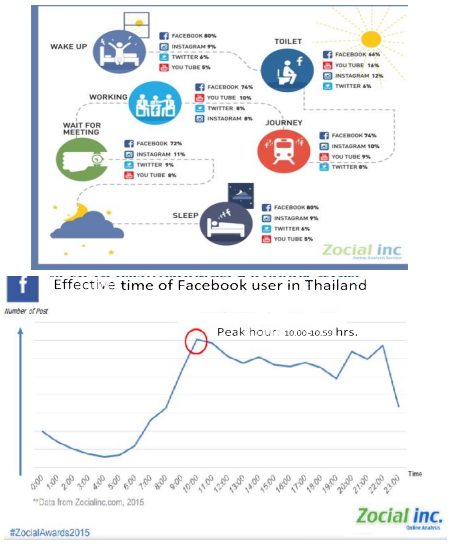


Fig 2. Smartphone leads to more intensive online activities during a day

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Zocial Inc. has conducted a survey on social media in Thailand in 2014, and revealed that Facebook and LINE are the two major online services being used by its 655 respondents at the rate of 99% and 84% respectively. The report also confirms Facebook as being the most popular online service during idle time throughout the day, from "wake up" to "bed time".

Apparently, Facebook has become an online platform where majority of internet users in Thailand spends most of their time online in publishing, discovering and disseminating contents, and also interacting with their social network. However, Facebook is not the only platform that Thai people use.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to explore the Internet user typologies in Thailand. There are several studies that covered Internet user typologies before but the last comprehensive one was back in 2011. So, it is the time to update the information and cover the context of developing countries which has never been done before.

In the previous studies, several types of Internet users are shown and the studies were conducted in the U.S. or EU. One noticeable observation is that the researchers were able to differentiate Internet users by the applications that they use. This fact has changed drastically since nowadays the users use many Internet programs altogether. So, it is expected to find new groups of users and new ways to group them.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes the survey approach. 400 questionnaires were distributed and answered. The area covered in the metropolitan area including Bangkok, Thailand. The sampling method is stratified sampling to have the similar profiles as the overall population. The questionnaire consists of three parts: the demographic part, the online activities part, and the other questions part. After the questionnaires were collected, the data were input into SPSS and the cluster analysis was conducted in order to categorize different kinds of Internet users in Thailand.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result, it is possible to characterize internet users in Thailand to 4 user groups with distinct characteristics based on our study. Those 4 user groups are (1) Online Hardcores, (2) Rational Users, (3) Social Addicts, and (4) Social Followers.

Despite all 4 user groups share a common characteristic of using Facebook to stay connect and get update within their social network as the main internet service, it is still possible to differentiate these user groups based on their usage pattern of internet services.

1) *Online Hardcores* use internet services much more intensive than other user groups, both in terms of time and frequency. They also use wider range of internet services for various purposes, e.g. communication, entertainment, networking, and etc, as they are more tech savvy than other user groups. They seek entertainment mainly from online services, and are serious users of Twitter and online games.

2) Rational Users use variety of internet services at lesser degree than Online Hardcores, both in terms of time and choice of services. They usually choose internet services that are proven to be effective for specific purposes or more productive than doing it offline. They are the representatives of career professional, with apparently higher usage of specific internet services, e.g. blogging and programming, than other user groups.

3) Social Addicts are heavy users of Facebook and messaging services, spending most of their time online to communicate and keep up with the dynamic of their social networks. Having the tendency of being individualists, they are expressive and strive to establish status among their social networks. They are also receptive to news and willing to try new applications or services if suggested by their social networks.

4) *Social Followers* use Facebook and messaging services to keep up with the social dynamic, similar to Social Addicts but at lesser degree. The main reason for adopting internet services for this user group is to connect with their families and friends who are members of other user groups.

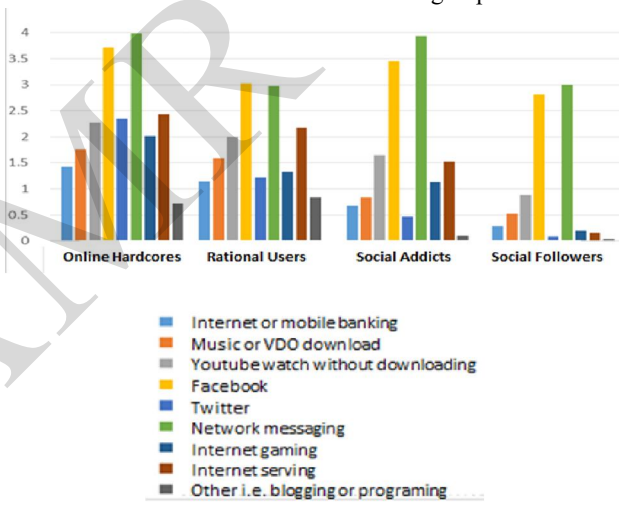


Fig 3. Usage frequency of internet services by different user groups

Facebook has become the primary online social platform for internet users in Thailand, followed by LINE as online communication. This is also common across all user groups in our study, where Facebook becomes an integral part of their daily lives. On the one hand, internet users use Facebook to archive their thoughts, emotions, and moments in life in various forms (text, photo, video, link and etc) as if it is their online journal or diary, and also share those contents with their families and friends, and even to public. On the other hand, we also witness the increasing usage of Facebook as a channel for receiving news and updates of their social networks through the notification feed feature.

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Table I: Profile Of 4 Different Groups Of Internet Users In Thailand

	Online Hardcores (24.70%)	Rational Users (18.50%)	Social Addicts (28.50%)	Social Followers (28.20%)
Gender	Male majority	Male majority	Female majority	Female majority
Age (years)	21-25 / 31-35	26-40	21-35	36-45
Monthly Income (THB)	< 40,000	<50,000	< 30,000	< 30,000
Education	2/3 with undergraduate degree	1/2 with undergraduate degree; 1/3 with other degrees	1/2 with undergraduate degree; 1/3 high school graduate	Mostly high school graduate
Occupation	73.80% company employees	71.40% company employees	64.90% company employee	65.60% self employed/ own business

In the past years, Facebook users have increasingly post/shared public news, current info and topic of interest, which effective transform Facebook to be an online alternative of other traditional channels, i.e. as television, radio and newspaper, but leveraging from the capability of social networks to filter only relevant contents to be visible to the users. This also explains why internet users spend biggest share of their time online with Facebook.

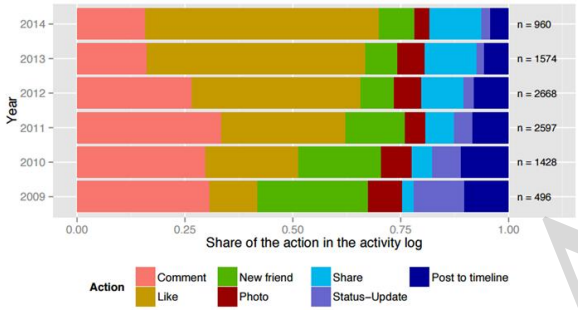


Fig 4. Trend of Facebook activities, 2009-2014

Another finding from our study is that internet users post/share (active activities) on Facebook at higher frequency than the past few years across all 4 user groups, but Online Hardcores and Social Addicts tend to post/share on Facebook with more diverged topics than other user groups. Additional, we observe the increase in share of passive activities, e.g. comment and like, on Facebook, indicating the preference of users on quick activities over active activities, e.g. post/share, which require more effort and commitments.

V. CONCLUSION

This study aims to find different types of Internet users in developing countries using Thailand as a case study. The study reveals that the traditional ways of categorizing Internet users by the applications that they use as in the past does not work any longer. It shows that Internet users nowadays use many applications together and needs to be grouped differently from the past. The new groupings are proposed based on the activities, rather than the applications, of the users. This finding helps further the research in this area into finding the most appropriate methods to group the Internet users in the future.

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