

Youngsters develop blinkers from screens, researchers say

Michelle Chan

Close to half of Hong Kong's younger residents rely on social media for information, and that group tends to distrust or is simply dissatisfied with the government.

Those findings are the key points from answers that 829 Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong permanent residents aged 15 to

29 gave to researchers of Chinese University's Centre for Youth Studies over the phone last year, when they were questioned about their social media habits and political participation levels.

Among those who said they get their news mostly from social media, about 80 percent are doubtful about the government's performance, compared with 50 percent whose news comes from other sources.

Youngsters who use social media as their major source of news are exposed to more negative comments about the government, which may lead to conformity, researchers said.

"Compared to traditional media, social media contains more critical comments toward the government, so negative emotions are built up easily under this atmosphere," said Stephen Chiu Wing-kai from the Sociology Department of CUHK.

Chiu said social media is dominated by criticism of the government because authorities seldom use social media sites to promote positive information about themselves.

He suggested government officials revise their youth strategies and try to communicate more via social media.

The study also shows young people on average spend more than four hours surfing the internet daily, with one to two hours on Facebook.



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Youngsters are also more active in online political events, with three out of every four respondents sharing political commentaries, expressing political views, liking political parties' Facebook pages and signing online petitions.

But fewer than half had gone out or into action directly, such as by joining protests and assemblies, donating money to political groups or boycotting products.

As for a public perception that youngsters tend to be radical, 40 percent said they actually dislike radicals.

"It's an illusion that all young people have radical political stances," said Wilson Wong Wai-ho of CUHK's Department of Government and Public Administration.

But "public discussion about politics is still in its infancy. We need to enhance tolerance toward various political stances."

MARK SIX

No 17/001

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