

Expert urges caution as more youth take personality tests online

More young people in Singapore have taken online personality tests based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) framework in the past three years, according to companies that offer such assessments and quizzes.

Truity, one of many online companies which provide online personality tests based on the Myers-Briggs theory of 16 personalities, told *The Straits Times* that nearly four million users from Asia took their TypeFinder personality test over the past three years. This number included 187,760 users from Singapore.

Truity's chief executive and founder Molly Owens said the number of people from Singapore who took her firm's personality test went up by 115 per cent from the summer of 2021 to 2023.

These users from Singapore were mainly young people, she said, with 27 per cent aged 18 to 24 and 33 per cent aged 25 to 34.

The volume of MBTI-related content on social media has also risen, with the TikTok hashtags #mbti and #mbtipersonality having 14.6 billion views and 3.8 billion views respectively.

On Instagram, there are about one million posts with the tag #mbti and 202,000 posts with the tag #mbtimemes.

MBTI is an online self-report questionnaire meant to help reflect one's own psychological preferences for how they perceive the world and make decisions, indicated by a four-letter combination.

For example, a person categorised under the type "INFJ" would be someone with introverted, intuitive, feeling, and judging personality trait preferences.

Many Singaporean youth opt for online MBTI quizzes as these are free, compared with the Myers-Briggs Company's online assessment called MBTIonline, which costs around \$66.

Responding to queries, the Myers-Briggs Company said many people who take online quiz variants are misled into thinking they are taking the scientifically validated MBTI assessment.

Truity's online TypeFinder test, for example, is based on the Myers-Briggs theory of 16 personalities but is not the actual assessment.

Dr Hsu Fang-Tze, lecturer at the department of communications and new media at the National University of Singapore (NUS), said the Covid-19 pandemic could be one reason for online MBTI tests becoming more popular among Singaporean youth.

"The first collective sentiment we need to recognise for this generation is that they are finding who they are and where they belong," she said. "This particular longing has been further strengthened because of that sense of isolation and solitude during Covid-19."

Dr Hsu said the test has been a way for Singaporeans to categorise themselves. "As humans, we want to find a sense of belonging, to know who we are."

She noted that there are existing methods of categorising people in Singapore, like the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others or CMIO model for the purpose of social harmony.

The animals of the Chinese zodiac are another example of categorisation, she added.

In the realm of dating, MBTI has been used as a means of testing for compatibility.

Dr Hsu said a reason could be that people in countries such as Singapore and South Korea are overworked, and turning to dating apps as a more efficient means of finding partners. MBTI is one way of testing for compatibility quickly, she added.

Some dating app users in Singapore have added their MBTI to their bio to introduce themselves to other users on apps like Bumble, allowing users to get a sense of what their potential partner is like at a glance while swiping through profiles.

Undergraduate Jaynielle Claire Tan Pineda, 21, took an online MBTI test this year, which she said has helped her understand herself better. Her friends her age are doing the same, she noted.

"We enjoy doing quizzes just to pass time," said Ms Pineda. "It can be fun to compare our MBTI test results and see how we are similar or different."

She added that she does not let the results change how she lives her life or views others, and that she takes them with a pinch of salt.

Undergraduate Selena Chua, 22, said taking an online MBTI test two years ago helped her understand herself better and why she did things in a certain way.

Ms Nur Diyanah Hasan Malik, a 21-year-old undergraduate, said taking the online test last year helped her find peers who were similar to her, and make friends more easily.

Associate Professor Ryan Hong from the NUS department of psychology said some Singaporean youth are testing themselves for their MBTI as they are in the midst of discovering themselves, their interests and their aspirations.

But they should interpret their results with caution and consider doing other personality tests as well, he said, noting that most academic research focuses instead on the Big Five personality theory and its tests.

The Big Five dimensions is a concept in psychological trait theory comprising five factors – openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

"Personality is complex and the MBTI's tendency to pigeon-hole people into one of the 16 types does not do justice to the great diversity of individual differences that we see in people's personality," he said.

If Singaporean youth test for their MBTI mainly for educational and entertainment purposes, then there is no harm, he added.

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