

THE HABITS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE (SNS) USE AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Article history

Received

29 December 2015

Received in revised form

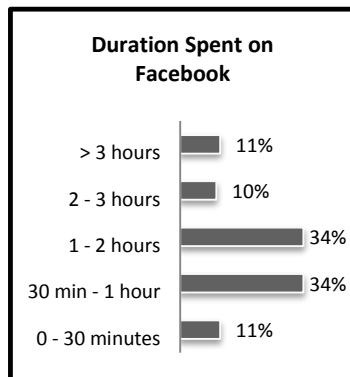
24 March 2015

Accepted

1 August 2015

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Graphical abstract



Abstract

The rise of social networking sites (SNSs) is currently overwhelming. Individuals are now able to interact, connect, and share information, photos, and other media in various SNSs. Facebook is one of the largest and most populated SNS in the world that is accessible by anyone including university students. Hence, it is interesting to understand the habits of use of such application by students, how they interact on these sites, and the nature of their influence on the deployment of Facebook into formal learning and as course communication tool. Findings from this research revealed that majority of the respondents use Facebook approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours daily. They also use Facebook not only to share entertainment materials but also communicating with their classmates on course related topics. Similar to the findings from another study, the students communicated on Facebook using a one-to-many style however in a more passive manner as most of the instances, they are not the creator of the content but only as viewer. This study could be extended to study more in-depth habits of SNS use by postgraduate students.

Keywords: Social Networks Sites, Facebook, technology use, university students, postgraduate students

Abstrak

Kemunculan laman rangkaian sosial (SNS) pada masa ini amat memberangsangkan. Individu kini boleh berinteraksi, berhubung, dan berkongsi maklumat, gambar, dan media lain dalam pelbagai SNS. Facebook merupakan salah satu SNS terbesar dan paling padat di dunia yang boleh diakses oleh sesiapa sahaja termasuk pelajar universiti. Oleh itu, adalah menarik untuk memahami tabiat penggunaan laman tersebut oleh para pelajar, bagaimana mereka berinteraksi di dalamnya, dan sifat pengaruhnya Facebook terhadap perkembangan pembelajaran secara formal dan sebagai alat komunikasi. Penemuan daripada kajian ini mendapati bahawa majoriti daripada responden menggunakan Facebook lebih kurang 30 minit hingga 2 jam setiap hari. Mereka juga menggunakan Facebook bukan sahaja untuk berkongsi bahan-bahan hiburan tetapi turut berkomunikasi dengan rakan-rakan mereka tentang topik-topik yang berkaitan dengan pembelajaran. Sama seperti penemuan daripada kajian yang lain, gaya hubungan yang diguna oleh para pelajar dalam Facebook adalah perhubungan satu-ke-banyak tetapi dalam cara yang lebih pasif kerana mereka bukan pencipta kandungan malahan lebih sebagai penonton. Kajian ini boleh diperluaskan untuk mengkaji lebih mendalam tabiat penggunaan SNS di kalangan pelajar pasca siswazah.

Kata kunci: Rangkaian Laman Sosial, Facebook, penggunaan teknologi, pelajar universiti, pelajar pasca siswazah

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

To date, there are hundreds of social networking sites (SNSs) operating all over the internet. Some of these sites are targeted at very specific interest groups while others are general in nature. Most of the SNSs are commonly used by individuals to share a "profile" which is a representation of themselves which also would reflect their own circle of friends for others to view with the intention of contacting or being contacted by others, to meet new friends, to find new jobs, receive or provide recommendations and other social networking activities [1]. There are many types of SNS which serve a variety of purposes. Among the myriad of online social networks, Facebook stands out for three reasons: its success among college crowd, the amount and the quality of personal information users make available on it, and the fact that, unlike other networks for young users, that information is personally identified¹. The same thoughts are expressed by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe [2], that like other social networking sites, such as Friendster, Tribe.net and MySpace, Facebook enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate "friends" who can post comments on each other's pages, and view each other's profiles.

Facebook is also a popular SNS in Malaysia. At the global front, it has 1.32 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2014 [3]. In Malaysia alone, the number of users has reached over 15 million which is equivalent to 53% penetration rate from the total population. 32.8% of the users are 18-24 years old, another 32.8% are 25-34 years old and 13.3% are 35-44 years old [4],[5]. The frequency of weekly access to the Facebook is also nearly double (88%) than world average (47%) [6]. Facebook has been ranked as the most used site among university students [7] which make it impossible to find students who were not Facebook users. It was also reported that students spent 60 to 120 minutes daily on Facebook [8]. Similarly, a study by Junco [9] found students spent around 101 minutes in average on Facebook.

1.1 Students and Social Networking Sites

In the US, the use of Facebook is now nearly ubiquitous among students, with over 90% participation among undergraduate students as reported in some surveys [2]. It has also become one of the most popular SNSs used by British students [10]. Several studies established the relationship between Facebook use and social capital levels among students [2][11]. One study particularly study the Facebook usage habits by undergraduate students which found that Facebook provides the students with a way of maintaining and strengthening social ties, which can be beneficial in both social and academic settings [12]. However, Hew¹³ in his review of 36 articles related to Facebook use by students and teacher concluded that the findings of the studies shown little educational use of Facebook by students. All the reviewed studies were sampling undergraduate students. There is a lack of studies being done on habits of Facebook use by postgraduate students. The maturity and priority of the

two groups might differ and being reflected in the activities performed while they are using Facebook. However, a study by Irwin, Ball, Desbrow and Leveritt¹³ found no difference between undergraduate and postgraduate students in their perception of Facebook as an effective learning tool. However, this is among the few researches highlighting the pattern of usage by postgraduate students while the rest of the studies mostly focused on the use of Facebook by undergraduate students.

1.2 Habits of Social Networks Sites (SNSs) Use by Malaysian Students

Several researches have been conducted in investigating students' use of SNSs in the Malaysia context [15-19]. An investigation into the use of Web 2.0 by students [16] revealed that university students are well exposed to Web 2.0 technologies and are willing to use them in the learning environment. However, findings from a nationwide survey [19] on tertiary level students in Malaysia on SNSs use showed that although most of the time spent on the sites are for social networking and learning, only half (50.3%) use it to get in touch with their lecturers in informal learning contexts. The overall results also indicated that the students are actually spending more time on SNS for socializing rather than learning although they generally do not believe that the use of SNS is affecting their academic performance. The socialization in SNSs is one of the ways for students to release their stress on the academic activities. It was also found that majority of students use social network sites for passing time or to fight boredom [16] as SNSs use is perceived to provide enjoyment to the students [18]. A study [14] also indicated that majority of the students perceived that SNSs have a positive influence towards their academic performance with the postgraduate students found spending less time on non-academic activities on the SNSs compared to the undergraduate students.

1.3 Focus of the Study

The communication taking place in SNSs reveal important information about how adolescents and young adults are interacting with one another in the information age. Hence, it is vital to understand the habits of use of such application in students' context, why students use these sites, how they interact on these sites, and the nature of their influence on the use of Facebook into the formal learning and as course communication tool. It also has been highlighted that there is lack of study focusing on postgraduate students. Therefore, the focus of this study will be on Facebook use by postgraduate students. It will investigate how much time the postgraduate students spend to use Facebook, why and how they use it. Information obtained from this study could provide a further understanding on the SNSs usage behavior especially by postgraduate students in institutes of higher learning in Malaysia.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The web-based survey consists of 46 questions adapted from previous work [2],[20],[21]. The survey is divided into two parts. The first part intends to understand how students use social networking sites. It consists of 23 questions about the time spent on Facebook, why do they use Facebook and the activities they performed on Facebook. In the second part of this survey, there are another 23 questions where the students need to provide their demographic information such as sex, race, year in college and specific information that they have in their Facebook profile. Most of these questions used a four-point Likert scale of "not much," "some," "quite a bit," and "a whole lot". The instrument was previously validated for content and face validity through a pilot involving 30 students at a local university. Invitation emails from one of the authors were sent to 160 postgraduate students of a computing school of a university in Malaysia to the survey. The email contains a short description of the study and a link to the survey. Reminder emails were sent to those who did not respond to the initial invitation. The response rate was 75% where 120 of the respondents responded and completed the surveys.

3.0 ANALYSIS

Table 1 highlight the demographic profile of the 120 respondents, 35% of them are male while 65% are female. 92% of them are full-time students while only 8% are part-time students. Age group of those who participated in the survey are from; 18-21 years old (19%), 22-27 years old (38%), 28 years old and above (43%).

Table 1 Demographic profile of respondents

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	42	35
Female	78	65
Age		
18-21 years old	23	19
22-27 years old	46	38
28 years old and above	51	43
Programme Mode		
Part-time	10	8
Full-time	110	92

3.1 Time Spent on Facebook

As shown in Figure 1, most of the students reported logging on Facebook either "a few times" (51%) or "several times" (38%) on an average day. Upon closer inspection, Figure 2 indicated that 34% of the students reported the most likely time for them to log on Facebook was during the evening hours from 9:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m. and from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (22%).

Regardless of how busy the students were, Facebook use was integrated into their daily lives. This is consistent with Figure 3 which showed they spend 30 minutes to 1 hour (34%) and 1 hour to 2 hours (34%) on an average day on Facebook. Only 11% respondents spend less than 30 minutes or more than 3 hours on Facebook.

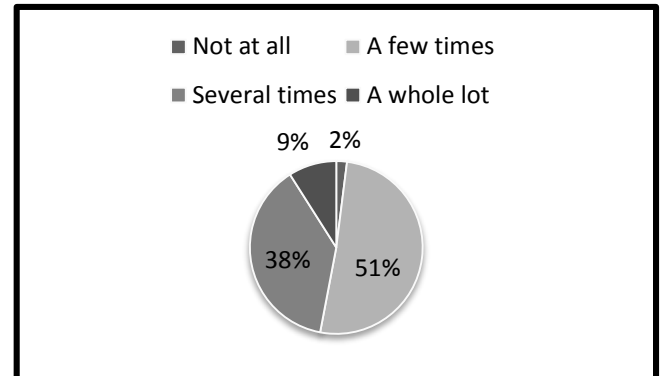


Figure 1 Facebook Login Frequency

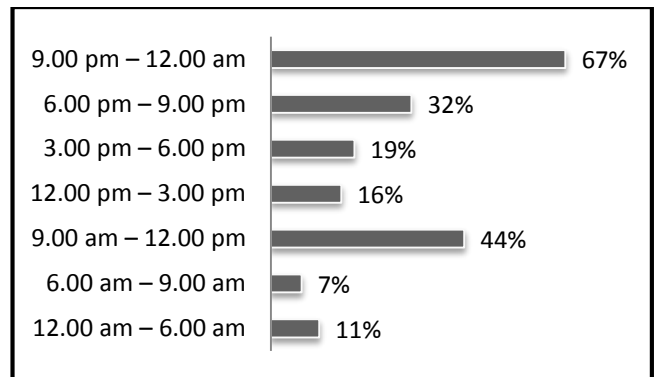


Figure 2 Range of time spent on Facebook

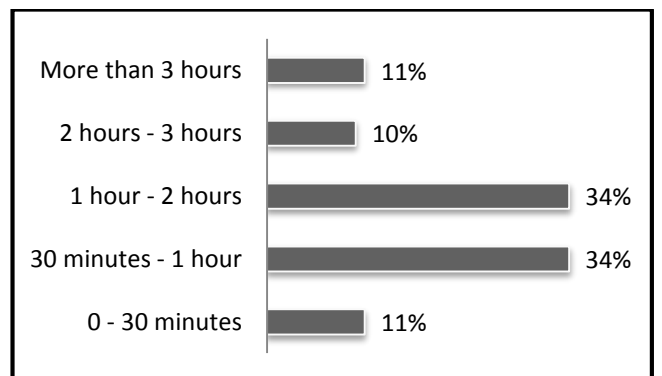


Figure 3 Duration spent on Facebook

3.2 Why do students use Facebook?

One question in the survey asks about what the respondents do in Facebook where respondents are allowed to choose more than one activities from the list of several activities that are relevant to students context (Figure 4). The top three activities are; sharing photos, music, videos or other work (79%), communicate with classmates about course related topics (76%) and staying in touch with friends (65%). 34% use Facebook

as a forum to express their opinions and views while 31% indicated that they use Facebook for academic purposes like communicating with their classmates, instructors and lecturer about course-related topics. This

is more than the time they spend on other activities unrelated to academics.

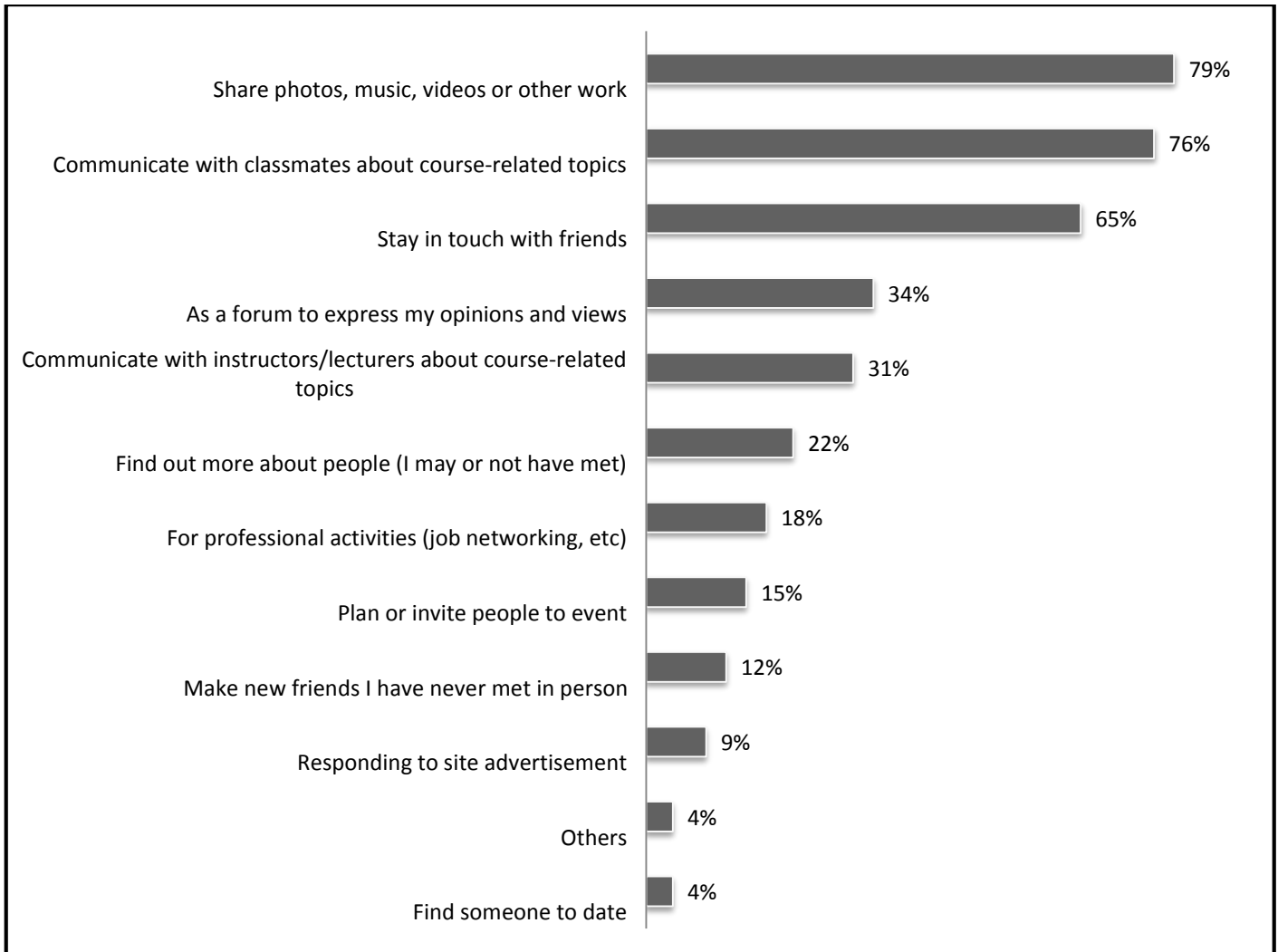


Figure 4 Reasons of Facebook Use

Table 2 Respondents' Intensity of Facebook Activities

	Response			
	Not much	Some	Quite a bit	A whole lot
Having fun	16	46	29	9
As a way to express their identity and opinions	28	48	21	3
Finding someone to become romantically involved with	76	16	6	2
As a way to relax	6	42	36	16
Keeping up with people they know in the real world	9	38	33	20
Finding information on people	15	37	31	17
Taking a break while working	11	37	38	14
As a way to avoid working	61	27	11	1
Getting help with school work	8	39	37	16
Keeping up with social happenings or events	14	40	36	10
Fighting boredom	30	38	24	8

Additional information about students' habits of Facebook use came from survey responses. Using a

four-point Likert scale with responses ranging from "not much" (1) to "a whole lot" (4), students rated 12

specific reasons. Those 12 reasons were however rated somewhat equally with no particular reasons being significantly rated more by the respondents over the other. However, as shown in Table 2, three most popular reasons why the students use Facebook are; keeping up with people they know in the real world (33% "quite a bit", 20% "a whole lot"), getting help with school work (37% "quite a bit", 16% "a whole lot") and as a way to relax (36% "quite a bit", 16% "a whole lot"). In contrast, the least popular reasons of using Facebook among the students are finding someone to become romantically involved with (76% "not much" and 16% "some") and as a way to avoid working (61% "not much", 27% "some").

3.3 What do the students do on Facebook?

The students have been asked about the frequency of performing certain activities while they are using Facebook. As seen in Table 3 as marked in bold,

popular activities being performed daily includes looking at groups (61%), reading post on their walls (59%), reading their news feed (57%), reading private messages from their friends (47%), interacting with groups (47%), getting information from friends about a course (46%), reading post on friends' walls (39%), looking at photos (35%), reading their own mini feed and responding to events or any invitations (34% respectively) and looking at other people's profile (30%).

While the activities that are rarely performed in Facebook includes creating groups (73%), creating events and sending invitations (64%), adding or removing groups (62%), posting videos from YouTube.com (58%), changing current status (52%), updating or editing profile (48%), adding or removing friends (44%), posting notes (43%), posting photos (38%), tagging or untagging photos (35%) and looking at video links in others' profiles (33%).

Table 3 Response on Frequency of Performing Activities on Facebook

	Response				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Hourly	Rarely
Looking at groups	61	15	6	13	5
Reading post on your wall	59	16	5	12	8
Reading your news feed	57	15	5	12	11
Reading private messages from others	47	21	7	7	18
Interacting with groups	47	21	9	8	15
Getting information from others about a course	46	20	11	8	15
Reading post on others' walls	39	24	8	7	22
Looking at photos	35	33	11	3	18
Reading your mini-feed	34	27	8	6	25
Responding to/reviewing events/invitations	34	26	13	5	22
Looking at/reading other people's profiles	30	24	13	5	28
Creating groups	6	7	12	2	73
Creating events and sending invitations	6	11	16	3	64
Adding or removing groups	7	11	17	3	62
Posting videos from Youtube.com	5	20	15	2	58
Changing current status	9	19	18	2	52
Updating or editing profile	8	13	29	2	48
Updating or editing profile	8	13	29	2	48
Adding or removing friends	15	15	23	3	44
Posting notes	18	24	12	3	43
Posting photos	11	22	26	3	38
Tagging or untagging photos	13	28	21	3	35
Looking at video links in others' profiles	15	30	18	4	33
Posting on walls	23	31	13	4	29
Commenting on photos	26	34	13	5	22

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study intends to understand the habits and patterns of Facebook usage in terms of how much time, and why do students use Facebook. Regardless of how busy students were during the week the findings indicated that, Facebook was part of the

students' everyday routine. Eighty nine percent (89%) of respondents will log on to their Facebook every day with majority of them reporting spending approximately 30 minutes to 2 hours of Facebook each day. This tally with other studies [8],[9] as discussed in the earlier section.

This study also found that majority of the respondents indicated that they use Facebook for academic purposes compared to other activities unrelated to academics. This is quite different with findings of another study [20] which reflected that large percentages of the respondents have never performed similar academic related activities while using Facebook.

The study also focused on what do students find interesting about Facebook. As seen in Table 3, popular activities which more than 50% of the respondents performed daily include looking at groups, reading post on their own wall and reading their news feed. These may reflect the respondents' preference as postgraduate students as they are usually known to rely on certain academic or non-academic groups in Facebook to gather information related to their studies or getting support. According to Pempek *et al.*, [20] Facebook consists of a one-to-many communication style where information presented reaches many viewers at a time like traditional media such as television and film viewing. Thus, this explains the students' interests with information in the Facebook groups. However, the Facebook interactions of this group of respondents are in more passive manner as most of the time, they are not the creator of the content but only as viewer.

The findings indicated that students would use Facebook to establish good contact with classmates, assist them to do homework, discuss on assignments and projects. Lecturers should take advantage of this by utilizing Facebook for education purposes by creating Facebook group page for their courses. It could enhance students-instructors communication. Building on the face-to-face, teacher-student relationship, social networks allow students to glimpse instructor profiles containing personal information, interests, background, and friends, which can enhance student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate [21]. Future research should also look more on the pattern and effect of Facebook use among postgraduate students as it may reflect different research findings as shown in this research.

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