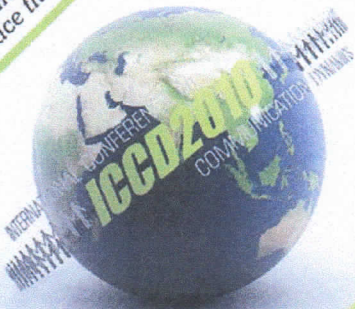


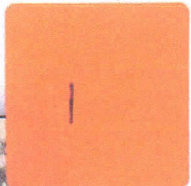
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UTeM'S Undergraduate Experience on Facebook: Preliminary Findings

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Abstract

Social networking sites are becoming more popular and are being used by different groups of people. A market study conducted by Nickburcher (2009) on facebook usage reported that there are now 27 countries with over 1 million people using Face book. Malaysia was reported to have 1,069,260 million of people log on to Face book by March 2009. Among the popular social networking sites are Face book, MySpace and Twitter. However in Malaysia, little is known about how much, why, and how users use Face book. In this study, 100 engineering undergraduates comprises of 50 males and 50 females of Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka completed their reflecting journaling method across five days and supplemented by survey were completed, reporting the prevalence and time spent, why and how they use the Face book. Preliminary findings of the study indicated that females participants spent more time than their males counterparts on Face book as part of their daily routine. The females' participants spent more time observing or reading through the posted content on Face book than actually posting content. However the participant's reports that they use Face book more often for social interaction with whom they have built offline relationship. Implications of Face book use for the development of identity and peer relationships are discussed.

Key terms: Face book, engineering undergraduates, experience

Introduction

Advert in Internet has provided numerous medium of online social networking sites (henceforth SNS). It provides "...an important backdrop for the social, emotional, and cognitive development of youth, accounting a large portion of their time (Roberts, Foehr & Rideout, 2005). According to marketingcharts.com (2009) the following were the top four SNS visited in August 2009; Face book (39.5%), MySpace (23.7%), YouTube (13.2%), Tagged (1.7%) and Twitter (1.4%). In other market study, Nichbucher (2009) reported that there are 27 countries who has over one million people using Face book. Malaysia was indicated as having 850,420 million on 30 December 2008 and recorded an increase of 25.7 % growth of Face book users which makes the total of Face book users in Malaysia 1,069,260 last 17 March 2009.

SNS such as Face book, My Space, Twitter, Friendster allow any individual or users to present and disclose themselves, articulate their social network and establish or maintain connection or relationship with others. It allows users to post self profile, username, and photograph and to communicate in an innovative ways such as sending public and private online messages or sharing photos online. These sites provide information about how users' communication takes place in this information age. Ellison et al., (2007) mentioned that these SNS can be oriented towards romantic relationship initiation (e.g. Friendster.com), connecting those with shared interest in music or politics (e.g. MySpace.com) or the college students' population (the original incarnation of Facebook.com). Individual visiting the SNS intentionally wishes to interact with someone whom they already know offline or with somebody new. Lampe et al (cited in Ellison et al., (2007) suggests that Face book users engage in searching for people with whom they have an online connection more than they browse for complete strangers to meet. Facebook allows individuals, to present and disclose their identity, making and accumulating new friends who can post comments on feedback on each other's pages and to view on each other's profiles.

To the researchers' best knowledge, there is little empirical research in SNS and it is understudied in Malaysia context. Thus, the purpose of this study is to provide descriptive

information about the use of Face book by engineering undergraduates in Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (henceforth UTeM). This study investigates how university students interact on this site.

2.0 Literature Review

This section discusses the literature review that forms the backdrop of this study. It will discuss the developmental considerations and Internet use, an overview of Face book, time spent on SNS, why and how youth use Face book and its plenitude section with the hypothesis of the present study which is formulated from the literature review presented.

2.1 *Developmental considerations and Internet use*

Rempek et al., (2009) stated that the key characteristics of youth development include the formation of identity, the development of intimate relationships, and the power of and power of their peer group. According to Erickson's (cited in Rempek et al, 2009) theory, identity development occurs through a series of conflicts that must be resolved at different stages throughout life. Erickson continues that early adolescence is marked by the conflict between identity and role confusion, in which the individual must work towards an integrated sense of self that considers the many facets of their life , particularly a sexual identity and moral ideology. Late adolescence is characterized by the struggle between intimacies and isolation, in which the individual, who now presumably possesses a well formulated sense of self, is able to fuse their identity with another person in the form of mature relationship.

2.2 *Overview of Face book*

Wikipedia (no date) Face book is a social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Face book, Inc Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school, and region. The website's name stems from the colloquial name of books given at the start of the academic year by university administrations with the intention of helping students to get to know each other better. Each user maintains a 'profile'

which is webpage containing basic information of user. This information may be updated from time to time by changing the current status message that appears at the top of the profile.

The Face book is available for use by anyone who has a valid e-mail address. Face book operates by allowing users to select or choose one or more networks to which they belong or of their interest. Users may select network sites for instance network such as school, university, geographical area or company.

Needman (cited in Ellison et al., 2007) stated; Face book was created in 2004 and by 2007 it already have 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views each day. The site is embedded in the lives of its users. Cassidy (cited in Ellison et al., 2007) in his study pointed out that a typical user spend about 20 minutes a day on the site and two third of the user log in at least once a day. Cassidy continues, in 2006 Face book was used at over 2,000 United States colleges and was the seventh most popular site on the World Wide Web with respect to the total page views.

2.3 Time spent on Social Networking Sites

Electronic media is ubiquitous influence in youth life development, with 8 – 18 year old U.S youth investing approximately 6.5hours per day with media (Roberts cited in Ellison et al.,2009). SNS had attracted the interest of adolescents and young adults. Spending time on SNS appears to be part of their everyday activity. In one study, about half off 12 – 17 years old with SNS memberships log on daily: 22% logged on to SNS several times per day, 26% once a day, 17% three to five times per week, 15 % one or two days a week and only 20% every few weeks (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Across the studies cited, survey method was used to assess how much time adolescents and young adults spend on SNS. The present study adds to this literature by asking why undergraduates willing to spend time and how they interact or communicate with one another at this site namely Face book.

2.4 Why and how youth use Face book

SNS is designed to provide a platform and foster social interaction for users to communicate in virtual environment. Generally, communication is facilitated through the contents posted in each

profile which often includes shot of photograph, personal information, interests meant to be shared by viewers. Members can view each other's profile and then communicate through various applications which is similar to email or online message boards. Such form of communication potentially attracts interest and concerns such as friendship and peer feedback.

In a study by Ellison et al., (2007), college students in U.S. showed that SNS are used to strengthened offline relationship or acquaintances rather than to make new friends. In fact, Ellison et al., found there is a strong positive relationship between Face book use and social capital. Consistent with Rempek at al.,(2009) study, noted that college students utilized SNS to communicate with friends on campus and was significant among the teens group. In another study, Buhrmester and Prager's (cited in Rempek et al, 2009) model, noted that peer feedback influences user's self esteem. They are easily affected by the remarks made by their peers. Buhrmester and Prager's model was proven in a study by Valkenburg et. al (cited in Rempek et al, 2009) among the Dutch adolescents and youth usage of social networking sites. The study documented that SNS members between the age of 10 to 19 years found that user's self esteem was directly related to the tone of responses received about information posted on their personal page (profile) and that self-esteem in turn, was related to their overall well being. These studies suggest that adolescents use SNS as a way to engage peer views about themselves and partly influence the identity formation.

Issue on how youth use SNS, currently, there is rather limited research on how youth make use of SNS. Often it is regarded that online sites are classified as temporary, innovative and has vast differences as compared to traditional media. However, there is one study conducted by Suziki and Calzo (2004) on online teen bulletin boards gathered that many visitors spent considerable time "lurking" (i.e. reading others' contents/posts without posting any reply or feedback. At this end, the present study will look into how Face book users interact or communicate on face book.

2.5 Purpose and Hypothesis of the study.

Based on the literature discussed, the present study has formulated its purpose and hypotheses based on the gaps identified in the literature. Primarily, the goals of the present study were to describe (1) how much time do university students use Face book site (2) why they use Face

book (3) how they use Face book. This study adds to the literature in several important ways. Firstly, it measures time spent, type of activities performed by university students among gender across five days period (Monday to Friday) using a diary method in order to provide a more detailed and accurate assessment of time use. Secondly, the study adopts an open ended questions in order to engage and clarify why university students use face book, which is triangulated with survey information on the type of activities that they carried out. Lastly, the nature of social exchange that takes place on Face book is explained. Based, primarily on findings reported by GreyReview (2009) on the snapshots of Social Networking in Malaysia this study formulated the following hypothesis:

- H1. Young adults would use Face book daily
- H2. Young adults would use Face book primarily for social interaction
- H3. Young adults would use Face book to interact with their offline friend rather than searching new friends
- H4. Young adults would post personal profile with intention for other users to read
- H5. Young adults would interact with one another by posting messages in public forums.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Participants

Thirty engineering undergraduates comprises of (20 females and 10 males students; mean age 21.09 years, SD = 1.05) from creative and critical thinking classes from the final year students were recruited as participants in this study. Only students who had a Face book account participated in this study and on average the participants had been using the Face book on average of one year. Most of the participants activated their Face book account during semester break (60.04%) though some activated their Face book at the beginning of the semester (39.96%).

3.2 Procedure

The goals of the present study were to describe (1) how much time do university students use Face book site (2) why they use Face book (3) how they use Face book. This study adds to the literature in several important ways. Firstly, it measures time spent, type of activities performed

by university students among gender across five days period (Monday to Friday) using a diary method in order to provide a more detailed and accurate assessment of time use. Secondly, the study adopts an open ended questions in order to engage and clarify why university students use face book, which is triangulated with survey information on the type of activities that they carried out.

3.1.1 Diary measure

The amount of time spent using Face book was assessed daily using a diary like measure in which each participant reported (1) the total amount of time that they spent on Face book each day for a one week period (2) checked the specific activities that they did on each day for that one week period. The activities listed were input from some participants and research assistant that are familiar with Face book. The diary measure also includes open-ended questions on Face book that were completed at the seven day period for instance (1) Why do you use face book (2) What is extremely interesting about Face book.

3.1.2 Survey

After handing in the diary measure, participants were given survey to be completed in one hour. The survey comprised of 50 questions and was divided into two parts Part A and Part B. Part A, respondents answered 27 questions on their Face book activities conducted last week whilst Part B respondents answered 23 questions where they furnished their demographic information.

4.0 Results

This section presents the results of the present study. The study has executed the pilot study. However, the main study will only be conducted in September 2010. Thus the the results reported is analysed based on data gathered in the pilot study (n= 30). The result is deemed sufficient to address the issue raised at this preliminary stage of this study.

4.1 Time spent on face book

From the diary measure, the total amount of time spent by participants on Face book on a given day differ greatly. It was noted that on week days, the range of time spent varies as little as 20 minutes to forty minutes whilst on weekends, whilst on week days the time spent is between the

ranges of 30 minutes to one hour. In response to survey questions, most participants reported logging in on either "a few times" (60%); "several times (40%). Face Book was integrated and embedded into respondents daily lives despite being busy.

4.2 Why do undergraduates use Face book?

4.2.1 Communicating with friends

Participants answered an open-ended questions pertaining to the reasons for using Face book. A large majority of participants reported that they used Face book to communicate or interact with their friends. The following excerpts from participants own words clearly described participant's reasons for utilising Face book.

I use Face book is to chat with my friends virtually....also via face book, I am sort of being updated with the group's whereabouts"

(Participant 1, Female, 2009)

I am quite a shy person...I prefer communicating via messages, wall posts ...I can strengthened my offline relationship or friendships...

(Participant 2, Female, 2009)

It is so easy, sign up and can chit chat already. Sometimes when i call my friend, they didn't pick up the phone....a lot easier

(Participant 2, Male, 2009)

4.2.3 Establishing Personal Identity

We were interested to engage with potential markers that might be used to express user's identity plainly because it is a vital developmental task in the adolescents' and young adult's life. We predicted that participants would mark Face book as medium to express self identity/profile or opinion because the self identity/profile is where students establish how they disclose themselves to others. Contrary to prediction, participants did not mention that Face book as medium to express self identity/profile or opinion. Instead, participants reported that they often posted media preferences such as favourite book, music, video clips and movies as one way to disclose their identity.

Who is able to view the profile may also play a role in how undergraduates disclose/present themselves and what information they choose to include. Profile information is made available to one's friend or all members to one's network. It was noted that, only 22 % participants belonged to college network; 46% of the participants reported they belong to a geographical network, 32% of the participant's belonged to more than one network. The ability to post instantly photos of one were identified as another means for the participants to express themselves.

4.2.4 What do participants find interesting about Face book?

Participants reported a variety of responses pertaining to the questions related to "what do they find interesting about Face book". Responses include; connecting and reconnecting with friends and learning about others from information posted in the personal page. The following excerpts explained what participants' find interesting about Face book.

I am able to reconnect or keep in touch with some of my long lost friends

(Participant 12, Female, 2009)

I can see or know who my frienda are and what they are doing

(Participant 19, Female, 2009)

What I found interesting about Face book is that...thw way people adopt to present themselves...

(Participant 29, Male, 2009)

4.2.5 How are participants interacting on Face book?

Face book is one-to-many type of communication, where information posted could be viewed by many viewers at a time. Face book users become the content provider of their personal page. As participants commented:

I make use of Face book to strengthened my offline relationship, meaning people whom I already knew and had acquainted long before

(Participant 24. Male, 2009)

I use it to maintain connections...Then posting photos to let others view

(Participant 16, Female, 2009)

Besides the reconnecting with friends and strengthening offline relationships, "lurking" and communicating on walls were mostly mentioned by participants as interesting about Facebook.

5.0 Discussions

This study investigates how much time spent by undergraduates' students on SNS such as Facebook, how and why they do so and how they interact using Facebook. In spite of their busy life in campus, yet at least 30 minutes of Facebook use was reported by the participants and has made Facebook embraced it in their life.

The question on as to why they use Facebook; across literature, it is consistent with previous study (Ellison et al., 2007) college students used Facebook to strengthened offline relationship or acquaintances rather than to make new friends.

With regard to identity disclosure, Facebook is a unique medium to display their profile. They reported that media preferences such as favourite music, favourite video and favourite books were vital in conveying or presenting their identity. Similarly, photos is best explained or helped them to present their identity.

Our final question involved how participants interacting on Facebook. Wall posts were a preferred way of interacting with friends and other group members in the network. Comparatively between interacting on wall posts (public wall) and private exchanges, findings suggested interacting on public wall is more frequently done than private exchanges.

In conclusion, SNS such as Facebook provides new medium or venues for youth and young adults to express themselves and interact with one another. We found too that, considerable lurking with undergraduates were contented to look at friend's profiles and to have their own profiles scrutinised as well. Posting to walls and posting pictures for others to view and observe highlight a public communication style.

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