

Religious Motives for Using Facebook among University Muslim Students

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ABSTRACT

Facebook is now the most popular social networking site among Muslim youth since it is a great way to catch up with old friends, to get information, and to interact with others. So, it is encouraged that Muslims who become Facebook users to join the site with good intention such as to strengthen relationships with family members and friends, to build useful network, and to support an Islamic group. Therefore, this study tries to find out the motives for using Facebook among its users at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The specific objectives of this study are: (1) to find out the characteristics of Facebook users among IIUM undergraduate students; (2) to find out the patterns of usage among Facebook users; (3) to find out the religious motive for using Facebook among IIUM undergraduate students; and (4) to find out the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook use among IIUM undergraduate students. This study used a survey research design. Descriptive statistics was employed to answer the research objectives. The results showed that the majority of IRKHS students are Facebook users. Many of them are extrovert Malaysian females, aged 22 years and above. They are heavy users of Facebook and highly connected with others. IRKHS students do use Facebook for religious motive. They use Facebook mostly “to preach people to do good things”. They claim that Facebook is beneficial in maintaining relationships with others and for doing *dakwah*.

Keywords: Social networking site, Facebook, pattern of Facebook usage, religious motive for using Facebook, Muslim students.

INTRODUCTION

Facebook is the most popular social media among youth. Founded in 2004, Facebook aims to facilitate youth to connect virtually with all of their friends and family members. Facebook became accessible to high school students in 2005 and to commercial organizations in 2006 (Foregger, 2008). As of today, Facebook has more than 500 million registered users. A survey in 2008 reports that almost all (93%) of university students in the United States are Facebook users, where they spend 47 minutes everyday on the site (Sheldon, 2008).

Until today, many students in Malaysian universities have signed up for a Facebook account. Facebook, in a way, helps these students to strengthen their relationships with old friends and with family members who live across the globe. This act practices Islamic teaching. Allah S.W.T encourages Muslims to keep practicing this: *“O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;- reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you”* (An-Nisaa’ 4:1).

Therefore, this study attempts: (1) to find out the characteristics of Muslim Facebook users at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), specifically students at the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS); (2) to find out the patterns of usage among Facebook users; (3) to find out the motive for using Facebook; and (4) to find out the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook use according to Muslim students.

HISTORY OF FACEBOOK

Facebook started in 2004, when it was launched by Mark Zuckerberg, an undergraduate student at Harvard University. Zuckerberg made Facebook simply as a virtual place for Harvard’s students to get to know each other better and to make new friends (Markoff, 2007). It turned out, at the end of 2004, Facebook had almost one million active users and by May 2005, other 800 college networks listed on the website (Foregger, 2008).

Until September 2006, only those who had email address ending with .edu could join as members. It changed when the Facebook membership is opened to the general public, allowing anyone with a valid email address to become a member of Facebook, however, full

profile of Facebook users remained restricted for full viewing only to those within the same network (Foregger, 2008).

USES AND FEATURES OF THE FACEBOOK

People use Facebook to keep up with friends, to upload an unlimited number of photos, and to learn more about the people whom they meet online (Elder-Jubelin, 2009). Facebook also allows users to create and to customize their own profile with photos and with miscellaneous information, namely, basic information, personal background, contact information, and education history.

Basic information on Facebook includes user name, hometown, gender, birth date, interest in (for example: women, men), looking for (e.g. friendship, relationship, and networking), political views, religious views, and family members. While personal information comprises interest, favourite musics, favourite quotations, favourite movies, favourite television shows, and favourite books (Facebook.com, 2009). On one hand, contact information contains email address, personal website/blog, instant messaging screen names, home address, mobile and land phone numbers. On the other, education history includes information on university, high school, city/town, and study specialization (Facebook.com, 2009).

Facebook also permits its users to set their own privacy settings. There are two types of privacy setting on Facebook, that is, public profile and private profile. Public profile is open for all to view, while private profile restricts its information to a list of friends that the users chose (Facebook.com, 2009). Each profile is also customized with many features.

According to Elder-Jubelin (2009), the useful features on Facebook are the chat feature, a network, and a wall. The chat feature allows Facebook users to talk to their friends on the site. The network is an affiliation a user chooses to be a member of and an example of would be one that includes IIUM students. The wall feature displays public conversation between Facebook users and their friends. The wall also contains users' profile picture, full name, and list of friends. Facebook also permits users to share status, links to videos and news articles on the wall.

Status is a line of information that appears next to Facebook users' profile picture (Carter, 2008). It aims to inform a user's friends about his/her current activities or thoughts. To share links to video or news articles on Facebook means that users can embed videos or news articles from other website to their profile. For example, videos from Youtube.com and news articles from TIME.com.

Another Facebook feature, that makes it different from MySpace, is it permits users to add various applications to users' profile. For example, True Path application aims at giving reminders based on *Al-Qur'an* and *hadith* to other Facebook users and their friends.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974) states that people differ in the gratifications that they seek from the mass media (Cited in Sheldon, 2008). Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) outline four basic assumptions of this theory. First, the audience is active and thus, mass media use is goal-directed. Second, the initiative in linking need gratification with media choice lies largely on the audience. Third, the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction, and forth, the gratifications sought from the media may vary.

The needs and gratifications that people are looking for can be grouped into the following categories: diversion (escape from problems; emotional release), personal relationship (substitute of the media for companionship), personal identity, and surveillance (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). Later, researchers added a few other categories which include diversion and entertainment (Charney & Greenberg, 2002).

Generally, the Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on motives for media use, factors that influence motives, and outcomes from media-related behaviour. Many studies conducted show that different motives are linked to different media preferences, leading to different model of media exposure and use for different results (Sheldon, 2008).

Therefore, the Uses and Gratifications Theory is considered the most suitable theory to study the Internet (Charney & Greenberg, 2002; Kaye & Johnson, 2003; LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000) and the Facebook (Bumgarner, 2006; Foregger 2008; Sheldon, 2008).

MOTIVES FOR USING FACEBOOK

Motive is basic characteristics that influence people's action in order to satisfy their needs. Zillman (1982) defines motivation as "mood management", to describe the motivation for Internet use. These motivations include entertainment, information seeking, diversion, and relaxation (Cited in Yin & Shing, 2009). This definition can also be applied to motives for using Facebook since Facebook becomes a main communication tool, information source, and entertainment source for most people.

However, in this study, motive for using Facebook is defined as gratifications sought from Facebook. Coley (2006) claims that students use Facebook for various motives. Yet, only one motive is employed in the present study, that is, religious motive.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses descriptive survey research design to gather information from the respondents. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to the undergraduate students of KIRKHS to obtain the desired information. Berger (2000) as well as Wimmer and Dominick (1997) agreed that survey research has a certain well-defined advantages, such as, able to investigate problems in realistic setting, reasonable cost, and relatively an easy way to obtain great deal of information at one time.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of undergraduate students from Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) of IIUM Gombak Campus, Selangor. The Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences is the largest faculty in IIUM, with over 4000 students and 250 academic staff (Undergraduate Islamic Revealed Knowledge & Human Sciences, n.d). KIRKHS has 3228 local and international

undergraduate students. The Kulliyyah is divided into two divisions, that is, Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage Division (IRK) and Human Sciences Division (HS).

Sample Size

There are 3228 undergraduate students at KIRKHS, IIUM Gombak Campus. IRK division has 1318 undergraduate students (40.8%) while HS division has 1910 undergraduate students (59.1%). Based on a Israel's (1992) method, a 95% confidence interval level for the sample representing IRKHS undergraduate students are 353 students. The sample size is divided according to the number of students from each division.

Table 1 presents the number of students from the two divisions. A total of 145 undergraduate students from the IRK division (41.1%) were selected. On the other hand, a total of 208 undergraduate students (58.9%) were selected to represent the HS division.

Table 1
Sample Distribution Based on Division

Division	Population		Sample	
	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Frequency (n)	Percentage
IRK	1318	40.8	145	41.1
HS	1910	59.2	208	58.9
Total	3228	100.0	353	100.0

Data Analysis

All the items in the questionnaire were coded and analyzed using SPSS WIN 16.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the objectives of the current study.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Characteristics of Facebook Users

The profile of these Facebook users is presented in Table 2. It is found that a total of 299 students were Facebook users. More than half of the Facebook users were female students (59.9%) and the remaining were male students (40.1%).

In terms of age, about three quarters of the students who were Facebook users were aged 22 years old and above (74.0%). Another 26.0% of them were aged between 19-21 years old. About seven in ten of the Facebook users were from the HS division (65.6%) and the rest were from the IRK division (34.4%).

Table 2

Profile of Facebook Users

Profile of Facebook Users	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	120	40.1
Female	179	59.9
Total	299	100.0
Age group		
19-21 years old	78	26.0
22 years old and above	221	74.0
Total	299	100.0
M=22.44, SD=1.52		
Min=19.00, Max=30.00		
Division		
IRK	103	34.4
HS	196	65.6
Total	299	100.0
Nationality		
Malaysian	237	79.3
International	62	20.7
Total	299	100.0
Personality Type		
Extrovert	155	51.8
Introvert	144	48.2
Total	299	100.0

In addition, more than three quarters of Facebook users were Malaysians (79.3%) while the remaining were international students (20.7%). In terms of personality type, more than half of them were extrovert persons (51.8%) and 48.2% of them were introvert persons (48.2%).

2. PATTERNS OF FACEBOOK USAGE

Pattern of Facebook usage includes Facebook knowledge, source of information about Facebook, duration of having Facebook account, frequency of using Facebook, time spent using Facebook, importance of having Facebook account, place to access Facebook, time to access Facebook, and number of Facebook friends.

From a total of 353 respondents, only 299 (84.7%) of them were Facebook users. Table 4 presents Facebook usage among IRKHS undergraduate students. All respondents admitted that they knew the existence of Facebook on the Internet (100.0%). The sources of information about Facebook mainly came from friends (86.4%) or the Internet (51.0%).

Respondents were also asked about the duration of having their Facebook accounts ($M=15.43$, $SD=10.86$). More than half of them (55.1%) had been using Facebook for less than a year. Almost one-third of them (32.5%) had been using Facebook for 1-2 years. However, there were also Facebook users who had joined the site for more than three years (12.4%). The average number of years in having Facebook account was about one and a quarter years ($M=15.43$, $SD=10.86$).

In terms of the frequency of using Facebook, it was found that more than one-third of the Facebook users logged on to the site once a day (37.5%), with an average of almost three times per day ($M=2.67$, $SD=2.35$).

Table 3
Facebook Usage

Facebook Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook Knowledge:		
Yes	353	100.0
No	0	0.0
Total	353	100.0

(cont'd)

Table 3
Facebook Usage (cont'd)

Facebook Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Source of Information about Facebook*		
Friends	305	86.4
Internet	180	51.0
Electronic media (TV, Radio)	98	27.8
Family members	95	27.0
Print media (Newspaper, Magazine)	59	16.7
Duration of Having Facebook Account		
1-6 months	71	23.7
7-12 months	94	31.4
13-18 months	45	15.1
19-24 months	52	17.4
25-30 months	8	2.7
More than 30 months	29	9.7
Total	299	100.0
M=15.43, SD=10.86		
Min=1.00, Max=64.00		
Frequency of Using Facebook		
Once per day	112	37.5
Twice per day	69	23.1
Three times per day	55	18.4
Four to six times per day	49	16.4
More than 6 times per day	14	4.7
Total	299	100.0
M=2.67, SD=2.35		
Min=1.00, Max=24.00		

(cont'd)

Table 3
Facebook Usage (cont'd)

Facebook Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Time Spent Using Facebook		
Less than 15 minutes	50	16.7
16-30 minutes	97	32.4
31-45 minutes	15	5.1
46-60 minutes	86	28.7
More than 60 minutes	51	17.1
Total	299	100.0
M=56.31, SD=60.22		
Min=5.00, Max=600.00		
Importance of Having Facebook Account		
Not important at all	6	2.0
Not important	24	8.0
Less important	106	35.5
Important	129	43.1
Very Important	34	11.4
Total	299	100.0
M=3.53, SD=0.87		
Min=1.00, Max=5.00		
Place to Access Facebook*		
Room	222	74.2
ITD Lab	141	47.2
Kulliyahs' Lab	85	28.4
Cyber café	83	27.8
Library	72	24.1
Others (e.g. home)	22	7.4

(cont'd)

Table 3
Facebook Usage (cont'd)

Facebook Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Time to Access Facebook*		
Morning	110	36.8
Afternoon	83	27.8
Evening	119	39.8
Night	226	75.6
Others (e.g. free time)	22	7.3
 Number of Facebook Friends		
Less than 100	59	19.7
101-200	65	21.7
201-300	55	18.4
301-400	35	11.7
401-500	18	6.0
501-600	22	7.4
More than 600	45	15.1
Total	299	100.0
M=348.91, SD=302.10		
Min=4.00, Max=2000.00		

*Multiple responses

When asked about the time spent using Facebook, almost half of them (49.1%) stated that they spend less than half an hour per sitting exploring the site everyday. About one-third of them spend up to an hour (33.8%) and more than an hour (17.1%) in accessing the site. It was also found that on average Facebook users spend about one hour per sitting (M=56.31, SD=60.22). The results contradict a previous study by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2006). They found that undergraduate students of Michigan State University spend about 10-30 minutes per day on Facebook. The differences may be due to the fact that Facebook has many changes and modifications on the site, for example, interactive games to attract more users. Another reason is that back in 2006, Facebook only allowed students to join the site while

currently, Facebook is open to everyone, including celebrities, athletes, and people from major companies. Therefore, they have more opportunities for exploration of the site.

More than half of the Facebook users (54.5%) perceived that having Facebook accounts was very important or important to them. More than one-third of the Facebook users (35.5%) thought that having Facebook accounts were less important. However, one in ten of them (10.0%) viewed that having the Facebook account was not important/not important at all.

The places for using Facebook vary. About three quarters of them (74.2%) normally explored Facebook in their room. The remaining used Facebook at the ITD lab (47.2%), Kulliyahs' lab (28.4%), Cyber café (27.8%), library (24.1%), and at home (7.4%).

More than three quarters of the Facebook users (75.6%) often accessed the site at night while 39.8% of them explored Facebook in the evening. However, there were Facebook users who usually accessed the site in the morning (36.8%), in the afternoon (27.8%) and at any hour during their free time (7.3%).

In terms of the number of Facebook friends, almost half of them (41.4%) reported having less than 200 Facebook friends. On average, it was found that these Facebook users had about 349 friends ($M=348.91$, $SD=302.10$). The results supported Ellison and friends's findings in 2006 which indicated that MSU students had 150-200 Facebook friends only. This is because as of 2008, Facebook allows its current users to befriend anyone and not only their university friends.

MOTIVES FOR USING FACEBOOK

The third objective is to find out the motives for using Facebook among IRKHS undergraduate students.

Religious Motives

Table 4 tabulates the religious motive among the Facebook users in this study. The overall percentage for religious motive was 68.3%. The two most agreed upon religious motives by

Facebook users were “to preach people to do good things” (71.3%) and “to share notes on religious value” (70.6%).

Table 4
Religious Motives

Religious Motives	Level of Agreement (%)*						Overall (%)	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5	6			
To share reminder based on Al-Qur’an	6.7	6.7	16.1	25.8	20.4	24.4	69.8	4.19	1.47
To share reminder based on <i>Al-Hadith</i>	6.4	7.7	15.7	27.1	19.7	23.4	69.3	4.16	1.46
To share wisdom from <i>hukama</i> ’	7.7	7.0	16.1	27.4	21.1	20.7	68.1	4.09	1.47
To share <i>nasyid</i> videos	14.0	9.7	18.7	26.4	15.4	15.7	61.0	3.66	1.58
To preach people to do good things	6.0	5.7	13.4	27.4	23.4	24.1	71.3	4.28	1.42
To share notes on religious values	7.7	4.3	14.4	27.1	22.7	23.7	70.6	4.24	1.46
Total							68.3	4.10	1.35

*1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Slightly disagree; 4=Slightly agree; 5=Agree; 6=Strongly agree

More than two thirds of these Facebook users agreed that they use religious motive, such as, “to share reminder based on Al-Qur’an”, “to share reminder based on *Al-Hadith*” and “to share wisdom from *hukama* (Muslim philosopher)”, with 69.8%, 69.3% and 68.1% respectively. However, the least use religious motive was “to share *nasyid* videos” (61.0%).

The findings indicate that IRKHS undergraduate students agreed that sharing religious knowledge is highly encouraged in Islam. Allah S.W.T appreciates Muslims who are knowledgeable, “*God will raise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge. And God is well-acquainted with all ye do*” (*Al-Mujadalah*, 58:11). It is also reported in a *hadith* that Prophet Muhammad S.A.W said: “*Verily Allah and His angels, even the ant in its hole and the fish in the sea, verily (they all) pray for he who teaches people good*” (Narrated by Tabrani). In another *hadith*, Prophet S.A.W also said, “*Convey my teaching to the people even if it were a single sentence*” (Narrated by Bukhari). It shows that IRKHS undergraduate students still adhere to Islamic teachings.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING FACEBOOK

Advantages of using the Facebook

Table 5 presents the advantages of using Facebook. More than half of the Facebook users stated that the main advantage of using Facebook was to maintain existing relationships (58.1%).

Table 5
Advantages of Using Facebook

Advantages of using Facebook (N=299)	Frequency*	Percentage
To maintain existing relationship	174	58.1
To make new friends	66	22.0
To get information	52	17.3
To get friends' updates	35	11.7
To share ideas	24	8.0
To do da'wah	23	7.6
To improve social skills	9	3.0
To play games	7	2.3
To save budget	5	1.6

*Multiple responses

Being a social network site, Facebook makes it easy for people to find their long-lost friends, to reach their family members who live across the globe, and to make new friends. Islam teaches that the basis for Muslim bonding is the Rope of Allah S.W.T, as His verse, “*O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)*” (Al-Hujurat, 49:13).

IRKHS students also listed other advantages of Facebook use, namely, to share ideas (8.0%), to do *dakwah* (7.6%), and to improve social skills (3.0%). Facebook can also be beneficial in terms of getting information, sharing ideas and doing *da'wah*. Despite the social aspect, there is an additional advantage of Facebook, which is the religious advantage. IRKHS students have the opportunity to do *da'wah* through Facebook. Islam teaches that every action is accountable by their intentions, as His verse in *Al-Qur'an* “*Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious. For thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed in from His Path*” (An-Nahl, 16: 125).

Although the percentages were low, IRKHS students also stated other advantages of using Facebook, which are, to play games (2.3%), and to save budget (1.6%). The Facebook

is more fun for students because it has a lot of online games. They often played Facebook games such as FarmVille, Café World, and Mafia Wars in their free time. Students also preferred to use Facebook because it is a popular low-cost social networking site to communicate with their family and friends.

Disadvantages of Using Facebook

The disadvantages of using Facebook are presented in Table 6. These Facebook users admitted that the biggest problem about using Facebook was privacy violation (21.4%). Facebook allows its users to display their profile page in any way they wish and this behaviour may lead to privacy invasion, like cyberstalking and online identity theft (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

Table 6
Disadvantages of Using Facebook

Disadvantages of Using the Facebook (N=299)	Frequency*	Percentage
Privacy invasion	64	21.4
Lost track of time	60	20.0
Addictive	25	8.3
Narcissism	18	6.0
Procrastination	15	5.0
Gossip	9	3.0
Make fun of others	8	2.6

*Multiple responses

Another 20.0% of Facebook users stated that they tended to lose track of time when using Facebook. This may be due to the fact that Facebook has many interesting games and applications for them to explore. Facebook also tends to make them become addicted (8.3%), be narcissistic (6.0%), and procrastinate (5.0%).

Other negative behaviours of using Facebook were involving in gossip (3.0%) and making fun of others (2.6%). Students got to know their friends' current thoughts and activities on Facebook. Through status updates, some people tend to share a lot of personal issues or photos that are not supposed to be shared with others. For examples, marital issues, photos without *hijabs*, or monthly allowances. These may lead to backbiting that is strictly prohibited in Islam, as The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said, *“Do you know what backbiting is?” They replied, “Allah and His Messenger know best.” He then said, “It is to say something about your brother that he would dislike.” Someone asked him, “But what if what I say is true?” The Messenger of Allah said, “If what you say about him is true, you are*

backbiting him, but if it is not true then you have slandered him” (Narrated by Muslim). Therefore, it is strongly recommended to avoid this behaviour as it is against the Islamic teachings.

CONCLUSION

The study found that the majority of IRKHS undergraduate students were Facebook users. More than half of them were female students, aged 22 years old and above. Many of them come from the HS Division and are mostly Malaysian students. In addition, more than half of the Facebook users in KIRKHS were extroverts.

The majority of the IRKHS students admitted that they know the existence of Facebook on the Internet and having Facebook account was less important or important for them. They have been Facebook users for the last fifteen months and spend about an hour per sitting. Facebook users at KIRKHS also stated that they logged on to the site three times per day. On average, they had around 349 Facebook friends.

The overall percentage for religious motive was 68.3. The two most agreed upon religious motive by Facebook users were “to preach people to do good things” and “to share notes on religious value”. This illustrates that IRKHS students still adhered to Islamic teachings.

IRKHS students admitted that Facebook helped them in maintaining their relationships, meeting new friends, and getting the latest information. Facebook was also used as a medium for doing *dakwah*. They also found it interesting.

On the other hand, IRKHS students indicated that Facebook invaded their privacy. Being Facebook users, they had a tendency to get addicted and this often wasted their time. Thus, they were bound to procrastinate. Some students also used Facebook for gossiping and for making fun of others besides projecting themselves unnecessarily (narcissism).

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