Using online social networking: Students' purposes of Facebook usage at the University of Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Current research focuses on examining how much, why and how students use Facebook, one of the most popular social networking site, and understanding its impact on education and social interaction. The aim of this study is to examine the purposes of Facebook use in an undergraduate sample and explore time investment of the students to Facebook social network site. Social, daily and educational purposes while using Facebook were measured via a questionnaire administered to 1300 undergraduate students. The results indicate that only 6.2% students have no Facebook account. Facebook members participated in this study reported that they had been on Facebook for 2 years or more, log in to Facebook several times in a day and spend approximately 15 min or half an hour on Facebook daily and they have between 101-300 friends on Facebook. According to results, it is found out that purpose statements related to social and daily activities had a higher score than educational and school-related purposes' statements. When all purposes are evaluated together; having fun, contacting friends and following news on Facebook come to the fore as Facebook usage purposes.

Keywords: Facebook, social networking, students, purposes, uses

INTRODUCTION

Social network sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Windows Live Spaces, Orkut and Hi5 have attracted millions of users and they are used for many different purposes (Bicen and Cavus, 2010). According to the Nielsen Company 2010 statistics, people throughout the world spend a staggering 110 billion minutes on social network sites and 75% of all people visit social media sites (even if they are not members) (Local Relationship Management, 2010). Indeed, the popularity of social networking is highly demonstrable by the number of people using those (Cheung et al., 2010).

One of the most popular social networking platform is Facebook (Calvi et al., 2010; Hew, 2011; Dba and Karl, 2008; Mazman and Usluel, 2010; Onat and Alikilic, 2008; Pempek et al., 2009; Roblyer et al., 2010; Scale, 2008) which is clear leader of the social networking sector that has grown to over 500 million active users as of September 2010, an amazing achievement in only six years existence (Helms, 2010: 20). Originally developed by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes in 2004 at Harvard University in order to provide Harvard students with a place in which they could keep in contact with their classmates and could share study-related information (Calvi et al., 2010), also they can share creations, tell stories, and interact with others (Roblyer et al., 2010). They also allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks and establish or maintain connections with others (Ellison et al., 2007). Research on Facebook, in particular, has shown that students may reap social benefits from using the site (DeAndrea et al., 2012). In addition to those social benefits, social networking sites have been utilized for a variety of educational purposes and help students in educational settings. Karlin (2007) found that nearly 60% of students discuss education-related topics online such as college planning or learning outside of school and more than %50 talks about specific school work. Furthermore, approximately 297,000 Facebook members identify themselves as a faculty or staff; therefore Facebook network is not only used for social interaction, but also it is used as an instructional and educational material or as a platform (Roblyer et al., 2010).

Yet despite Facebook "burst beyond its roots" by achieving remarkable popularity in the last few years (Calvi et al., 2010), it is still unclear that what proportion of students use Facebook for social interaction, daily activities or educational purposes in Turkey. Moreover, understanding how much, why and how students use online social networking sites are crucial; however there exists relatively little research on its use and users in Turkey.

Despite its (Facebook use) rapid growth and current popularity in Turkey, there is very little academic research on usage profile, the amount of time students spend on Facebook in a day, the number of Facebook friends and the users' purposes to engage in Facebook. According to the internet usage statistics, the number of internet users in Turkey rose to 35 million at the end of June, 2010, almost 45% of the population, an increase of almost 25 million users in the first six months of year 2010. The current internet penetration rate in Turkey is 45% and it is in twelfth places in the list of top twenty countries internet usage rate (http://www.internetworldstats.com/euro/tr.htm). In terms of Facebook social networking site, it is the second most visited website with a total number well over 6 million users in 2009 (Erdogmus, 2009) and the most popular social networking site in Turkey (Ergenc, 2011). In 2008, about 3 million of Turkey's 71 million people signed up for and actively using Facebook (http://www.insidefacebook.com/2008/12/30/facebooks-growth-in-turkey-jumps-in-q3q4/). As of today, the total number of Turkish users on Facebook is about 30 million people. With these numbers, Turkey has launched into the top six most represented countries on Facebook with 30,959,340 users. It is surpassed by the U.S. (157 million users), Indonesia (41 million users), India (41 million users), Brazil (35 million users) and Mexico (31 million users). (http://www.checkfacebook.com/). Therefore, it is important to draw attention to

Facebook because of the fact that it deserves attention not only for the density of members in Turkey, but also its role in the part of the lives of its users (Erdogmus, 2009).

While it appears that a growing number of people in Turkey use social network sites and especially Facebook has become one of the most prominent and popular tool for social networking, there has been little research on how much and for what purposes students use Facebook in Turkey. Therefore, current research focuses on examining why students use Facebook and understanding its impact on education and social interaction. To this end, the aim of the present study is to examine the purposes of Facebook use in an undergraduate sample and explore time investment of the students to Facebook social network site.

LITERATURE REVIEW

More recently there has been an increasing interest in studying the use and effects of Facebook. Numerous empirical studies have been conducted to examine patterns of college students' use of Facebook. These focused on a variety of academic interests including Facebook usage profile (Dba and Karl, 2008) and also time spent on Facebook (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Pempek, Yevdokiya, & Calvert, 2009; Vasalou, Joinson, & Courvoisier, 2010), purposes of Facebook usage (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Lewis & West, 2009; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010; Vasalou, Joinson, & Courvoisier, 2010), effects of Facebook use on learning performance (Sanchez-Franco, Villarejo-Ramos, & Martin-Velicia, 2011), effects of Facebook use on college adjustment (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012) and also self-esteem, social and emotional adjustment (Kalpidou, Dan Costin, Jessica Morris, 2011), effects of Facebook use on sociability and social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Keenan & Shiri, 2009), educational usage of Facebook (Bosch, 2009; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010), use of Facebook in university libraries (Calvi, Cassella, & Nuijten, 2010; Scale, 2008) personality and motivations associated with Facebook use (Ong, Ang, Ho, Lim, Goh, Lee, & Chua, 2011; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Robert Orr, 2009), Facebook as a social search engine (Scale, 2008), marketing strategies for the Facebook generation (Boling, Burns, & Dick, 2011; Helms, 2010; Meadows-Klue, 2008), Facebook use in sport and leisure sector (Local Relationship Management, 2010; Wallace, Yang, & Miloch, 2010).

Despite there have been numerous researches conducted in different countries on understanding how much, why and how students use online social networking sites, very little data and quite a few articles exist on this subject in Turkey. Mazman and Usluel (2010) designed a structural model explaining how users could utilize Facebook for educational purposes. The study group consisted of 606 Facebook users in Turkey. The results showed that most Facebook users were between 18 and 25 year old (74.1%) and were college students (70.1%). The majority of the participants (38.8%) reported that they use Facebook several times within a day and spend an average of 30 min on Facebook per day. Ergenc (2010) also conducted a study which was done about Facebook to abstract the effects of the internet on the socialization among 200 university students in Istanbul. Respondents aged between 21 and 24 years old spend more hours on Facebook and they reported that they use Facebook several times within a day (59%) and stayed online in Facebook for approximately an hour (40%) with female students appearing to spend significantly more time on the network site than male students. Another study conducted by Onat and Alikilic (2008) focused on the advantages and disadvantages of social network sites for the advertising and public relations practices. One general conclusion of these studies was that Facebook plays a significant role in supporting pre-existing social relations (Wang et al., 2010), social interaction, marketing strategies, learning and teaching, and so it could generate a variety of positive social outcomes.

Therefore the main aim of this study is to investigate the Facebook usage of the students at Anadolu University in Eskisehir, and also to learn for which purposes the students use Facebook.

METHOD

The focus of this research is limited to the use of Facebook only. Therefore, this paper narrows its scope on the social networking site Facebook, and studies that deal with other social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace, Orkut or Hi5 are excluded. The decision is deemed appropriate as it is the most popular online social networking site among university students (Cheung et al., 2010; Dba and Karl, 2008; Hew, 2011; Mazman and Usluel, 2010; Roblyer et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2009). Thus, we believe that Facebook is appropriate for the current study.

Participation was solicited from 1300 undergraduate students enrolled in classes at Anadolu University in Turkey. To select students a quota sampling technique was used.

In this study, the main purposes included social, daily and educational goals while using Facebook were measured via a questionnaire administered to 1300 undergraduate students. Using a questionnaire, how much and for what purposes students use Facebook was described. For groups of respondents who needed further explanations in filling out the questionnaires, the researcher helped the respondents to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire contains three parts.

In the first part of the questionnaire students were asked whether or not they have a Facebook account. The students without a Facebook profile were asked to indicate the reason of why they haven't got a Facebook account. The students with a Facebook profile were then asked to indicate their membership duration, number of friends and time investment in Facebook.

The second part of the questionnaire aimed at gathering the students' purposes of Facebook usage. 14 statements that consisted of the domain of social networking usage purposes were adapted from Dholakia et al. (2004); Iqbal et al. (2010); Mazman and Usluel (2010), Pempek et al. (2009), Vasalou et al. (2010) with some modifications and wording revisions to fit our study. The last part of the questionnaire included demographic characteristics of the students.

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Students

A total of 1300 questionnaires were achieved after the effort of data collection. Demographically, gender of the respondents was almost evenly distributed with 49.96% male (609 students) and 50.04% female (610 students). As for the age groups , 45.3% are in 21-22 age bracket, 26.7% is in 19-20 age group, 18.2% is in 23-24 age group, 5.5% is in 25 and over age group and 4.1% is in 18 and below age groups. As for the level of education that participants attained, 27.8% of the students are studying in the third class and 25.9% of the participants reported that they are studying in the fourth class. In terms of average house hold income, 35.3% of participants have between 451-902 USD, 30.5% of participants reported an income of 450 USD or less which was follwed by another 19.6% who earned between 903-1352 USD. Only 7.4% reported a monthly income between 1353-1803 and 6.7% of participants have 1804 USD or more.

Facebook Usage of Students

Results, shown in Table 1 (Appendix), indicate that almost all of the students use Facebook; 81 (6.2%) out of 1300 undergraduate students reported that they have no Facebook account. They further indicated the reasons why they don't have a Facebook profile including they are not interested in Facebook (40.7%) and Facebook is not convenient for its aim (27.1%). 1219 respondents (93.8%) indicated that they have a Facebook account.

In response to research questions, most students (57.3%) reported that they had been on Facebook for 2 years or more. The target behavior "stay active and loyal" (Vasalou et al., 2010) was measured by asking students the frequency of visits on Facebook and lenght of stay in Facebook. Frequency that students reported visiting on Facebook varied greatly.

Purposes of Facebook Usage

Facebook can be used for different purposes by students with different interests and purposes. It is suggested that Facebook is being used for learning about others, maintaining social communication, following updates about friends, school or class (Mazman and Usluel, 2010). Though designed for social uses, Roblyer et al. (2010) suggested that Facebook can be used for classwork-related purposes by the students. Therefore, in this study, statements related to purposes of Facebook usage were developed including both social and daily activities and also school related/educational activities, as shown in Table 2 (Appendix).

By running descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation were found for each purposes of Facebook usage statement. According to descriptive statistics, "following photos, videos, events etc." purpose had a higher score (Mean= 3.83, standard deviation= 0.9611) than other purpose statements.

According to results, it is found out that purpose statements related to social and daily activities had a higher score than educational and school related purposes' statements. As seen in Table 2 (Appendix), "appealing to friends for helping about school works", "getting infomation about homework, information, material, project, resources or ideas" and "sharing homework, information, material, project, resources or ideas" have lower mean score than other statements. It is also found that "communicating to teachers in any scholl-related case" had the lowest mean score. Therefore, the statements related to educational purposes of Facebook use were considered to be closer to "seldom" and "sometimes". When all purposes are evaluated together; having fun, contacting friends and following news on Facebook come to the fore as Facebook usage purposes.

Differentiations of Facebook Usage Purposes

ANOVA and t-tests were applied to assess the demographic differentiations of the Facebook usage purposes as shown in Table 3 (Appendix). As for gender, according to t-test results, PLAGMS, CHTING, GETINF and METPEO were found to be significantly different for male students compared to female students. Male students' mean values were assessed higher than were those of female students for PLAGMS, CHTING and METPEO purposes.

As for age groups, according to ANOVA results, there were significant differences for HAVFUN, FOLPVE, CHTING, SPTIME, GETINF, COMFRI, MSGING and METPEO purpose statements. Younger students' mean values were assessed higher than the other students for all of the purposes. As for average house hold income, there were no significant differences for the purposes. Lastly, FOLPVE, CHTING, SHAEDU, MSGING and METPEO were found to be significantly different for the education level. For chatting purpose

statement, mean scores of students with lower education levels were found to be higher than students with higher educational levels.

Differentiations of the Facebook Usage

ANOVA and t-tests were applied to assess the demographic differentiations of the Facebook usage as shown in Table 4 (Appendix). As for membership duration, according to ANOVA results, male students' mean values were assessed higher than were those of female students. Students who are younger with lower income and lower education level were found to be shorter membership duration than other students. As for the frequency of visits on Facebook, it is found that male students use Facebook more frequently than female students. As for number of friends, male students with higher income and education level who were 25 and over have more friends on Facebook than other students.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Social networks sites are currently used by highly heterogeneous people with different ages, education levels, gender, social status, language and culture who participate and incorporate social networks into their daily lives (Mazman and Usluel, 2010). In a 2006 study, Facebook which was named the second most popular social networking sites among undergraduates (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook) and it is indicated by several studies (Cheung et al., 2010; Dba and Karl, 2008; Hew, 2011; Mazman and Usluel, 2010; Roblyer et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2009) that Facebook is heavily used by most undergraduates. Therefore, the scope of this study is consisted of Facebook and its common users; students. Facebook users who participated in this study consisted of undergraduate university students who were between the ages of 21-22 (45.3%).

The empirical findings of this study suggest a number of important implications for the understanding of why and how students use Facebook. First, the results indicate that only 6.2% students have no Facebook account since they are not interested in Facebook (40.7%). Other students who have a Facebook account reported that they had been on Facebook for 2 years or more, log in to Facebook several times in a day and spend approximately 15 min or half an hour on Facebook daily. The result of the study also indicated that the majority of the students have between 101 and 300 friends on Facebook.

Second, the results show that students use Facebook for not only social purposes but also educational purposes as suggested by Bosch (2009) and Roblyer et al. (2010). However, consistent with previous researches (Ellison et al., 2007; Pempek et al., 2009), students mainly used Facebook for social purposes rather than educational purposes. The results also revealed that students use Facebook especially to have fun, to contact with friends and to follow photos, videos, events etc. on Facebook. Facebook is not generally used as a tool to get or to share information about school related news and to communicate with the teachers, contrary to popular claims suggesting students use Facebook for school-related works. Thus, it can be said that Facebook is rarely used for educational purposes. It appears, therefore, that Facebook fulfills its role as it was intended by its creators: to support social networks (Kalpidou et al., 2011). It is also revealed that Facebook is not generally used for meeting new people as suggested by Ellison et al. (2007). In their research, it is suggested that more Facebook use involving contacting with an existing friend, a classmate, someone living near them, or someone they met socially rather than use involving meeting new people.

On the contrary to Muise et al. (2009)'s study, It was revealed in this study that male students spend significantly more time on Facebook than female students. As for number of friends, male students have significantly more friends on Facebook than female students on

the contrary to Pempek et al. (2009)'s study findings which was suggested female students have significantly more friends on Facebook than male students.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all research, this study is not free of some limitations, and it suggests avenues for future research consideration. First, only one type of social networking site was assessed here. Future research should also examine other social networking sites usage purposes of the university students. The current study focused specifically on a limited number of people. Future research on usage purposes of Facebook could be extended to include a wider demographic base, both geographically and internationally, to further explore the extent to which the findings are generalizable. The respondents in the study were limited to those who study in one single university. Furthermore, the focus on Turkish student places the research in a particular cultural context. Consequently, the results may not adequately represent the total student population in Turkey. Although the sample was appropriate for a survey on social networking use by the students, results may differ if other people in different university are studied.

Further researches may apply our conceptual framework to other contexts or samples such as high school students or graduate people, or teachers. Future studies should also be conducted with students from different countries in order to better understand whether different sociocultural contexts may influence the purpose of Facebook use. Different countries have different cultural and social implications and different habits regarding using social networking sites usage. Therefore, a different assortment of usage purposes can provide interesting results and new insights into social networking usage. A future study that compares different samples of countries can shed light on this issue and this effort would provide a great helpful insight to clarify the aims of Facebook usage.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Facebook Usage of Students

Statements	F	%	Statements	F	%
Do you have a Facebook account?			**Frequency of visits on Facebook**		
Yes	1219	93.8	Few times in a year	5	0.4
No	81	6.2	Once in a month	4	0.3
			Several times in a month	159	13
Reasons not to get a Facebook account			Once in a day	441	36.2
I haven't time for Facebook	6	7.4	Several times in a day	610	50
I haven't got a computer	7	8.6			
I am not interested in Facebook	33	40.7	**Lenght of stay in Facebook**		
I haven't heard of Facebook before	4	4.9	Less than 15 min	109	8.9
It is not convenient for its aim	22	27.1	Approximately 15 min	337	27.6
Others reasons	9	11	Approximately half an hour	325	26.7
			Between 1 or 2 hours	263	21.6
Facebook membership duration			Between 2 or 3 hours	91	7.5
Less than 6 months	61	5.0	More than 3 hours	93	7.6
Between 6 months and 1 year	82	6.7			
More than 1 year, less than 2 years	377	30.9	**Number of friends**		
2 years or more	698	57.3	100 friends or less	155	12.7
			Between 101-300 friends	636	52.2
			Between 301-500 friends	315	25.8
			501 friends or more	113	9.3

Table 2. Purposes of Facebook Usage

Purposes	Mean	S.D.
Following photos, videos, events etc. (FOLPVE)	3.83	0.9611
Contacting friends who are away from home (CONFRI)	3.65	1.0342
Having fun (HAVFUN)	3.62	0.9483
Communicating with friends (COMFRI)	3.50	1.0539
Spending time (SPTIME)	3.48	1.0211
Messaging (MSGING)	3.45	1.0587
Getting information about friends (GETINF)	3.24	1.1071
Chatting (CHTING)	3.08	1.1532
Appealing to friends for help about school-works (HLPSCH)	2.66	1.1898
Meeting new people (METPEO)	2.49	1.2811
Playing games (PLAGMS)	2.33	1.3223
Getting information about homework, information, material, project, resources or ideas (INFEDU)	2.17	1.1136
Sharing homework, information, material, project, resources or ideas (SHAEDU)	2.08	1.0896
Communicating to teachers in any scholl-related case (COMTEA)	1.90	1.1200

Table 3. Differentiations of Purposes According to Demographics

Purposes	Gender		Age		Income		Education Level	
	t	p	F	p	F	p	F	p
HAVFUN	0.594	.553	6.158	.000**	1.795	.127	1.218	.301
FOLPVE	1.343	.180	6.716	.000**	1.239	.293	5.301	.000**
PLAGMS	-4.428	.000**	0.077	.989	0.984	.415	0.730	.571
CHTING	-2.525	.012*	4.674	.001**	0.406	.804	5.055	.000**
SPTIME	1.689	.091	4.374	.002**	0.533	.711	1.499	.200
SHAEDU	0.816	.414	0.541	.706	1.933	.103	2.597	.035*
INFEDU	1.387	.166	0.912	.456	1.119	.346	2.151	.072
HLPSCH	1.053	.292	1.778	.131	1.370	.242	1.226	.298
COMTEA	1.746	.081	0.098	.983	1.995	.093	0.231	.921
GETINF	2.285	.022*	3.508	.007**	0.688	.600	0.766	.548
COMFRI	1.580	.114	5.076	.000**	0.693	.597	1.763	.134
MSGING	-0.801	.423	4.004	.003**	0.917	.453	3.003	.018*
METPEO	-6.719	.000**	2.592	.035*	0.811	.518	3.044	.016*
CONFRI	1.286	.199	1.218	.301	0.238	.917	2.306	.056

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Table 4. Differentiations of Facebook Usage According to Demographics

Facebook Usage	Gender		Age		Income		Education Level	
	t	p	F	p	F	p	F	p
Having or not Facebook account	-1.000	.318	1.110	.350	0.447	.775	0.710	.585
Membership duration	-4.380	.000**	3.144	.014*	3.315	.010*	5.213	.000**
Frequency of visits on Facebook	-2.241	.025*	1.810	.124	2.147	.073	2.158	.072
Lenght of stay in Facebook	0.355	.723	1.010	.401	1.835	.120	1.020	.396
Numberof friends	-6.674	.000**	6.520	.000**	17.473	.000**	6.376	.000**

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01