



International Journal of Arts and Science Research

Journal home page: www.ijasrjournal.com



STUDENTS' USAGE PATTERNS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES – GAMBELLA UNIVERSITY

Gnigwo Gala Gnigwo*¹

¹*Department of Co-operative Business Management, Dean- Faculty of Business and Economics, Gambella University, Gambella-Ethiopia.

ABSTRACT

The growth and popularity of online social networks has created a new world of collaboration and communication. Facebook and Twitter are two social computing systems that have become increasingly popular among university students. The paper aimed at studying students usage patterns of social networking sites. Study area confined to Gambella University students of Gambella, Ethiopia. 194 samples have taken for the study with simple random sampling technique and data collected through a pre-tested questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square test are used to study usage patterns of social networking sites. The results have revealed many interesting facts related to study such students associate social networking sites in just a highest proportion with academic usage and communication as second preference. Mostly, social media is used 30+ minutes per day and students log on network several times in a day. Furthermore there were no biographical differences in the usage patterns and reasons of using social media.

KEYWORDS

Education purpose, Face book, Social network sites, Usage patterns and Student's involvement.

Author for Correspondence:

Gnigwo Gala Gnigwo,
Department of Co-operative Business Management,
Dean- Faculty of Business and Economics,
Gambella University, Gambella-Ethiopia.

Email: galagnigwo@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

The progressive evolution of the Internet has made it become the most popular communication medium. Over the years, a large portion of the people in the world is connected by social networks through the Internet (Oye *et al.*, 2012)¹. As result, in the daily lives of college students the use of social networking sites (SNS) continues to grow at an unprecedented rate and the number of accounts with other popular SNS is also rapidly increasing. Membership in Facebook, the world's largest SNS, has grown to >1 billion (Facebook, 2013)². Online social networking

(OSN) sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, are used on a regular basis by many millions of people. A major proportion of this online networking community is made up of college students. In fact, a recent survey of 3000 students from across the US revealed that 90per cent of college students use Facebook and 37per cent use Twitter (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald and Vockley, 2011)³. However, higher education institutions in the 21st century face significant social, economic, and technological changes that will substantially change the educational experience of students. Researchers should continue to monitor new and emergent technologies in order to see what tools have potential in the classroom and how receptive students are to using such tools. Recent research has discussed the opportunities associated with the use of Web 2.0 and social media tools in the classroom (Cronin, 2009⁴, Granitz and Koernig 2011⁵, Huang and Behara, 2007⁶, M. D. Kaplan, Piskin, and Bol, 2010⁷, Lowe and Laffey 2011⁸, Rinaldo, Laverie, Tapp and Humphrey 2013⁹, Sendall, Ceccucci, and Peslak, 2008)¹⁰. This research unpacks one element of the critical technological shift at universities by exploring the use of social media in higher education. This research examines several reasons of using SNS. First, we determine students' experiences with SNS and the extent to which students view social media. Next, we uncover students' reasons for SNS use. Third, we reveal usage patterns of male and female students of SNS.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nowadays, the new generations spend more time on social network in their daily life for social purposes. Social network media are seen to support a range of applications which display qualities associated with educational technologies already in use at university level such as communication, participation, interactivity and collaboration (Selwyn N, Crook C, Carr D, Carmichael P, Noss R and Laurillard D, 2008)¹¹. Such a way, social media have potential to support learning in ways that are not restricted by time and place (Contreras-Castillo *et al.* 2006¹², Hrastinski 2006)¹³. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)¹⁴ define social media as media "that allow the creation

and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61). This essentially means that all media that are used to support exchanges among people, including e.g. e-mail, wikis, blogs, content sharing and forums can be used as social media. It is the users that decide whether a medium is used in social ways or not. Most social media promote interaction among people, which is often argued as having positive impacts on learning outcomes in higher education settings, measured as perceived learning, grades and quality assessment of assignments (Fredericksen *et al.* 2000¹⁵, Hiltz *et al.* 2000)¹⁶.

In another study, Oradini and Saunders (2008)¹⁷ reported the use of social networking system 'Connect' by students and staff at the University of Westminster, UK. The system allowed users to create their own profiles, upload photographs and documents, create and join discussion groups, send messages, and publish blogs and presentations. An evaluation of the initial use of Connect by staff and students suggests that the system was able to play an important role. Similar systems developed by other universities show successful student engagement with such systems (Millar *et al.*, 2010a, 2010b)^{18,19}. But, most of the students are involved in the use of SNS mainly for socializing activities rather than for educational purpose (H.S., Hassan, H.M.K., 2014²⁰ and Adam Mahamat Helou *et al.*, 2012)²¹.

METHODOLOGY

In determining the students' usage patterns of SNS, used a quantitative research design based on a survey method through questionnaires. The questionnaire mostly incorporated questions that are of quantitative nature and covered objectives are firstly, to identify the reasons of using social networking sites among Gambella University students, secondly to investigate student's usage patterns of social networking sites. A sample of students at a large Gambella University was invited to participate in the study. 194 students were randomly selected and usable responses were received based on a table for determining a sample size by Krejcie and Morgan²². Secondary data were collected from different sources like articles from both national and international recognized journals, texts, websites and periodicals

published in the daily newspaper etc. These sources are used to obtain a pool of literature knowledge about social networking and its application in different areas of business. All quantitative data had been analyzed descriptively and inferentially using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean and standard deviation had been computed for descriptive data analysis and chi-square test had been used for inferential analysis.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

The responses of the respondents are always significantly affected by the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (Elangovan and Sabitha, 2011)²³. The demographic data shows that male students are (55.77 per cent) more prone to use social networking than female students (44.3 per cent). About 60.8 per cent respondents age 21- 25 years followed by 15-20 years (29.90 per cent) and more than 40 years (1.0 per cent). Out of 194 respondent 36.1 per cent are from first year as well as third year and rest of 27.8 percent from second year. Graduate students are more habituated to use social networking for their education perspectives (50.5 per cent) followed by communication (24.7 per cent) and only 10.3 per cent using for entertainment.

Accessibility and Social Network Sites Students use

Table No.2 presents accessibility of internet and social networks students use. As shown in the table, majority of these respondents (n = 164) reported that they had a Facebook account followed by held accounts with whatsapp (34 per cent, n = 66), and smaller percentages reported accounts with Friendster (27.8 per cent; n = 54) and Twitter (14.4 per cent, n = 28). Respondents are at highest rate using internet at cybercafe and mobile phone.

Use of SNS between male and female students

Research Hypothesis Test

H₀=There is no significant difference in use of SNS between male and female.

The students' use of SNS between male and female students are analyzed and the results are presented in Table No.3.

In male students, the results show that about 38.90 per cent of the students are several times in a day long on to SNS and followed by 31.50 per cent once in few days. Majority of male students (29.60 per cent) have been using SNS more than three years and followed by 2-3 years (25.90 per cent). 11-30 minutes is the time spent by highest rate (42.60 per cent) of respondents and less than 5 minutes is smallest portion (7.40 per cent).

About 46.50 per cent of female students log on SNS several times in a day which is highest rate and 9.30 per cent is least rate accessing several times in a day. It is apparent that about 34.90 per cent female students using SNS more than three years followed by 23.60 per cent (1-2 years) and 1.30 per cent (1-6 months) as smallest proportion. Majority of respondents (48.80 percent) are interested to spend more than 30 minutes time with social networks and least per cent less than five minutes (9.30 per cent).

The Chi-square values at five per cent level indicating that there is a significant no difference in use of SNS between male and female students. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Reasons of Using Social Networks

Part two of the questionnaire from table 4 shows students' reasons of using social networking sites with different behaviours of male and female. From the analysis of respondent's responses to the researcher's questions as indicated in question 1 to 12 in Table No.4. Although all the questions are very important to find difference in male and female student's usage reasons, but the highest mean score for male and female are 3.50 and 3.34 which are responses to the question —“I want to learn new things from other people through the use of SNS” an 100 (51.1 per cent) respondents ticking strongly agree show that the positive influence of the use of SNS on respondents' knowledge about knowing new things. Whereas looking at the lowest means scores of male (2.37) and female (2.39) of respondents responses to the question - “For playing online games” an average of 70 (36.1 per cent) of those who responded to that particular question ticking agree, certain students perception is that the use of SNS is to communicate with family/friends members easily. Furthermore we have varying mean scores as can be seen on table 4

above and in relation to the questions posed; different respondents have their various opinions. Although some were honest enough to agree that the use of SNS are different. However some choose to be neutral in providing answers to this question.

Table No.1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

S.No	Demographic characteristics		Frequency (194)	Percent
1	Gender	Male	108	55.7
		Female	86	44.3
2	Age	15 - 20 years	58	29.9
		21 - 25 years	118	60.8
		26 - 30 years	14	7.2
		36 - 40 years	2	1.0
		More than 40 years	2	1.0
3	Year of study	first year	70	36.1
		second year	54	27.8
		third year	70	36.1
4	Purpose of using internet	Research	28	14.4
		Entertainment	20	10.3
		Education	98	50.5
		Communication	48	24.7

Source: Computed from primary Data

Table No.2: Accessibility and social network sites students

S.No	Where do you use internet		Frequency (194)	Percent
1	I have access to the Internet at home	Yes	60	30.9
		No	134	69.1
2	I have access to the Internet at my college	Yes	96	49.5
		No	98	50.5
3	I use the Internet at my college library	Yes	98	50.5
		No	96	49.5
4	I use the Internet at cybercafe	Yes	44	22.7
		No	150	77.3
5	I use my hand phone to access the Internet	Yes	170	87.6
		No	24	12.4
Social network students use				
6	Facebook	Yes	164	84.5
		No	30	15.5
7	Twitter	Yes	28	14.4
		No	166	85.6
8	Whatsapp	Yes	66	34.0
		No	128	66.0
9	Friendster	Yes	54	27.8
		No	140	72.2

Source: computed from primary Data

Table No.3: Use of SNS between male and female

S.No		Gender	Male		Female		Chi-square	Sig.
			Frequency	percentage	Frequency	percentage		
1	How often do you usually log on	I'm constantly logged on	14	13.00	22	25.60	12.77 (df.4)	0.012
		Several times a day	42	38.90	40	46.50		
		Once in few days	34	31.50	16	18.60		
		Once in a week	12	11.10	8	9.30		
		Occasionally	6	5.60	0	0.00		
2	How long have you been using social networking sites?	less than a month	14	13.00	14	16.30	12.651 (df.5)	0.027
		1 - 6 months	10	9.30	2	2.30		
		6 months to a year	10	9.30	10	11.60		
		1 - 2 years	14	13.00	20	23.30		
		2 - 3 years	28	25.90	10	11.60		
		3 years+	32	29.60	30	34.90		
3	How much time (on average) do you spend	Less than 5 minutes	8	7.40	8	9.30	10.438 (df.3)€	0.015
		5-10 minutes	14	13.00	18	20.90		
		11-30 minutes	46	42.60	18	20.90		
		30+ minutes	40	37.00	42	48.80		

Source: computed from primary Data

Table No.4: Reasons of using social networks

S.No	Reasons of using social networks	Gender			
		Male		Female	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I want to get to know more people	3.3148	.66485	3.1860	.87207
2	I want communicate with family/friends members easily	3.3519	.80087	3.2558	.65223
3	I want to join some special interest groups or student activities in social network	3.2778	.68130	3.1860	.58263
4	I want to share some information and ideas with other people	3.3148	.69239	3.3256	.67437
5	I want to learn new things from other people	3.5000	.60373	3.3488	.71357
6	I am just curious	2.9259	.92427	2.7674	.86077
7	I want to find some old friends (schools, colleges, organizations etc.)	3.0370	.84196	2.6977	.85251
8	I join it for fun	2.8519	.93544	2.6744	.77145
9	For playing online games	2.3704	.93321	2.3953	.86895
10	I don't want to be left behind with what happens	2.6296	.73105	2.4884	.90152
11	I want to look for a partner or partners	2.7593	.84134	2.7907	.79643
12	I want to pretend to be someone else in social network	2.6296	.82703	2.7674	.88753

Source: Computed from Primary data

FINDING AND CONCLUSION

Due to the fact that technology changes daily, people, specifically students, are more enabled to become informed and aware of the different types of technological systems as opposed to a few years ago. The use of the internet has further enabled many people, students, and institutions around the world to communicate more effectively with each other on specific topics and issues at any point in time (Mangold and Faulds, 2009, p. 357)²⁴. Therefore, it becomes evident that the use of social media networking systems among tertiary institutions does not only make communication easier between them and the students, but it can also add a lot of value in encouraging discussions between and among students, as well as addressing administrative issues (Moran *et al.*, 2011²⁵, p. 4, Adamson, 2012)²⁶. This study attempts to obtain students' perceptions of the impact of social networking on their academic performance. Study discovered that students associate social networking sites in just a highest proportion with academic usage and communication as second preference. The findings of the study revealed that social media was used more for social purposes. Mostly, social media is used 30+ minutes per day, students log on network several times in a day and more than three years students were members and user of SNS. Facebook is the most used social media application and secondly whatsapp. The study also revealed that the majority of respondents that use social media are using mobile phone internet to connect SNS. Furthermore there were no biographical differences in the usage patterns and reasons of using social media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is sincerely thankful to the students of Gambella University for participating in the research and grateful to the staff and university for providing the facilities to complete this research paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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Please cite this article in press as: Gnigwo Gala Gnigwo. Students' usage patterns of social networking sites – Gambella University, *International Journal of Arts and Science Research*, 4(1), 2017, 41-47.