Social Networking Sites' Usage Trends and Adoption Among University Students: A Descriptive Analysis

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Abstract

Social network sites (SNSs) are penetrating deep among the lives of internet users owing to its social compatibility with modern online needs in the shape of constructing profile by providing their bio-data and hanging out with old and new friends in order to share and gain information. This study aims to investigate the usage pattern of SNSs and the adoptability of the users. A descriptive analysis was run on the random sample of 200 respondents surveyed in a large public sector university of Sindh, Pakistan. Results revealed that users feel proud by using SNSs and routinely log-on to their account at least once a day so as to know what is new on their wall from their around-the-hundred-contacts' activities. They felt as a part of larger SNSs community where they could find new friends, thus bridging social capital was prominent as majority of the respondents did not know their Facebook friends personally.

Keywords: Social network sites, usage trends, university students, Facebook, bridging social capital.

1. Introduction

Facebook is one of the fast growing social network sites (SNSs) in the world. It was first introduced in February 2004 as online social networking site. This site was opened for the general public in 2006 from a college confined registration condition. It was showed that in 2006 the user of Facebook was more than 12 million in the world and reached 350 million in 2009 (Sheldon, 2008; Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Currently in 2014 Facebook is used by more than 1.3 billion users across the globe (Facebook statistics, 2014). Facebook is basically an online social network site where an individual could transfer and share the information, knowledge, news, video clips, photographs, personal information, and contact their new and old groups of friends with one another on Facebook (Buckman, 2005). There are many ways to communicate with each other in Facebook ID users can send private or public messages to the receiver or friends at other side. Similarly Facebook user can email and attach files and send to friends, such as photos, letters, videos' and other things to (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009) even the message can be sent to the person who is not familiar.

There is no doubt that the popularity and wide spread use of social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and other have created a new place for social and interpersonal interactions among users. One of the most important and basic features of these online platforms is that they enable users to create and maintain social interactions through various functions through these technologies (Burke, Marlow & Lento, 2010; Papacharissi, 2009). The social networking sites have provided many things such as audio and visual capabilities comprising of web-blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, media shares, information spaces, Feeds, micro-blogging sites, Facebook, and LinkedIn having abilities to help in communication and interaction online. The appearance of an enhanced trend among users to hold the above social media sites particularly at school, college and university level. It seems to have changed communication patterns even at local level (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008).

The activists on social issues including Palen (2008); Vieweg, Palen, Liu, & Hughes (2008) indicated that social media could provide different ways for people to interact with each other on different occasions. Some international events have proved the above assertion that social media can form opinion and bring about social change. These events along others include London Riots 2011, change of Libyan and Egyptian Rule 2011 etc.

Vieweg, Palen, Liu, & Hughes (2007) further stated that media particularly social media is used as a tool for publicizing information and enhancing access of masses to it at the right time. The example of WikiLeaks can best be understood which publicized the critical and secret information to common people that otherwise seemed impossible to access.

Facebook is one of the most famous social media networking website all over the world which has connected the world very close and becomes the global phenomenon for the last many few years (Foregger, 2008). The introduction of social networking websites have impressed a lot of teenagers and particularly university students for getting the information and get connected with friends and class/schoolmates (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Salaway & Caruso, 2008). There is no doubt that social networking websites have created good environment with different applications for improving the knowledge and information among teachers and students (Ferdig, 2007; Maloney, 2007; Pence, 2007; Simoes & Gouveia, 2008). The research was conducted in British university about Facebook. The result revealed that students use Facebook for social activity and want to communicate with their friends, further result showed that there was no any main purpose of use of Facebook for academic matters, student use SNSs for only informal purposes (Madge, Meek, Wellens & Hooley, 2009).

2. Problem statement of research

The faster development of SNSs has provided new approaches and thinking to students to share their information and knowledge among each other. It was also indicated that students have many problems in use of social media network in different areas of developing countries and government still has not provided facilities to students regarding internet approaches and its uses in colleges and universities (Raynes-Goldie & Walker, 2008). Most of the students were interested to use Facebook on the internet. This social media network effect on the social life of the college and university students in different areas of the world. The one research showed that around 85% to 99% of the university and college students use Facebook along with other social media (Hargittai, 2008; Jones & Fox, 2009; Matney & Borland, 2009). Another result of one project entitled Pew Internet and American Life showed that 70 to 75% of the young students use Facebook (Jones & Fox, 2009; Lenhart, 2009; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).

This research aims to unearth SNSs usage trends in developing country like Pakistan because most of the research has been carried out in developed countries. This study will earmark new field and will add a diverse insight in the literature of SNSs usage. There is a need to tap the behaviour of students particularly developing countries because many students in different places have problems in the use of social media networks. In developing countries, like Pakistan, due to lack of infrastructure students are either not given facilities of internet or they have no access to such networks in their classes and libraries (Golder, Wilkinson & Huberman, 2007). That is why this study is carried out to know the trends that how students are using SNSs and how they are much into the frenzy of SNSs which has swept users all around the world.

Question: What are the trends of SNSs usage in university students, and how deep they acclimatize SNSs in their daily routine?

3. Method

3.1 Sample and procedure

The quantitative approach was applied for data collection. Total 200 respondents randomly were selected for data collection from Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan. Our questionnaire comprised of two sections; first one asked the questions regarding demographic information of gender, age, qualification and family income, while second portion consisted of usage intensity items to get information about usage pattern like timing and duration, friendship circle etc. The Likert-type scale of SNSs usage was borrowed with bit changes in order to suite our study from Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) comprised of ten items. The main objective of the study was to assess the use of Social network sites among university student and their timing and activities. The data were analysed by using SPSS (version 18) for this study.

4. Results and Discussion

The result indicated that 80% male and 20% female participated in this study. However, the respondents were also investigated about their age the result revealed that majority 75.5% of the respondents' age ranged between 18 to 21 years, while 22.5% of the respondents' age spread between 22-25 year and only two percent of the respondents' age was more than 26 years old in this study. Furthermore, the respondents were asked about their education level where result indicated that 79% of the respondents' education level was bachelor, 20% were

masters and only one per cent was PhD holders.

Table: 1 Demographic profile of respondents (N=200)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	160	80.0
Female	40	20.0
Age		
18-21	151	75.5
22-25	45	22.5
More than 26 years	4	2.0
Education Level		
Bachelors	158	79.0
Masters	40	20.0
PhD/post-doc	2	1.0

Data from table 2 show the respondents were asked about the frequent use of SNSs majority of 89% respondents replied that they have regularly use social networking sites and similarly the study was conducted in Malaysia (Hamat, Embi & Hassan, 2012) showed that more than 80% of the university students were having account on social media and they use social media frequently. While 11% of the respondents said they sometimes use social media. The respondents were also inquired about the favourite /frequently used SNSs, as expectedly the result showed that 96% of the respondents used Facebook, whereas 3.5% respondents were frequent users of twitter and only one per cent used other social network sites. That is not surprising that Facebook has emerged as widely used SNSs against the tiny representation of Twitter, because Facebook is sweeping users of the SNSs across the globe by having more than a billion users 2014. In an attempt to gauge log-on frequency, respondents were asked as to how many times they use particular website in a day the result revealed that 61.5 % of the respondents were used to open up their particular website once a time in a day, while 23.5% of the respondents use two times in a day. It shows the persistency of the users that at least they go online to check their account as to what is happening around them and go through the wall of the SNSs.

Further to glean information about time duration in a day we asked them how much time they spend once they log-on to favourite SNS. Results show that 45.5% of the respondents spent 15 to 30 minutes in a day on the favourite SNS, while 34% replied that they spent 30 to 60 minutes in a day and only 8% of the respondents prolonged their stay between 1 to 2 hours in a day. These statistics signify that users at least try to spend whatever time they find to keep abreast themselves with their online social network.When they were asked about as to how many friends they have the result showed that majority of 39% of the respondents were having 50 to 100 friends on their particular website and 28% of the respondents were 101 to 200 friend were on website, while 22.5% of the respondents only had less than 50 friends on social website (refer table 2).

SNSs provide platform to meet those new friends online whom in real life one cannot meet because of distance and place. In order to know whether users engage in such kind of activity we asked them that how many friends do they have in SNSs. The result showed that 39 % of the respondents responded that they know more than 50% friends personally. While, other 61% users confirmed that they knew less than 50% friends personally. This question signifies bridging social capital because users also look for new people to encircle them in their online friendship circle. Those new people might be useful in information acquisition and sharing. Although people do not know each other but still send friendship requests because of different reasons. While result showed that just 39% out of the sample size replied that they know more than 50% friends personally. While majority of the respondents reported their friendship circle consists on unknown friends who were just their Facebook friends.

Table: 2 Use of Social Media

Measures	Frequency	Percentage
Usage of SNS		
Regularly	178	89.0
Sometimes	22	11.00
Never	00	00
Frequently used SNS		
Facebook	192	96.0
Twitter	7	3.5
Other	1	0.5
Times per day		
One time	123	61.5
Two times	47	23.5
Three times	20	10.0
Four times	2	1.0
More than four times	8	4.0
Duration in a day		
Less than 15 mins	17	8.5
15 to 30 mins	91	45.5
30-60 mins	68	34.0
1-2 hours	16	8.0
More than Two hours	8	4.0
Friends on particular SNS		
Less than 50	45	22.5
50-100	78	39.0
101-200	56	28.0
201-300	6	3.0
More than 300	15	7.5
Personally known friends		
10%	56	28.0
20%	30	15.0
30%	19	9.5
40%	16	8.0
50% or more	79	39.5

The data from table 3 showed that 43% and 11% of the respondents were agree and strongly agree respectively, they were of the view that social network sites are their part of daily activity thus routinely communicate with friends and know about the people on social network sites. While, 31.5 percent of respondents were neutral about the social networking sites a part of everyday activity. However, 9 percent of the respondents were disagree and they do not consider SNSs as their daily activity they might be ones who rarely use SNSs. Only 5.5 % of the respondents were strongly disagree and said that social networking websites are not include in their everyday activity. Further, we asked them whether they felt proud using their favourite SNS, 54% and 16% respondents were agree and strongly agree respectively, it implies that users feel elevated to use SNSs which might be considered as a status symbol. The respondents were also asked about that when they do not use social media how do they feel. The result showed that 42.5 percent and 4.5 percent of the respondents were agree and strongly agree respectively, that when they do not log-on SNS they feel out of touch from social activities, while 23% of the respondents were neutral regarding out of touch from social media network. This item was intended to tap the information how much users have been obsessed and have acclimatize SNSs in their life. Furthermore, the respondents were investigated about being part SNSs community. Result revealed that 45.5% and 14.5% of the respondents were agree and strongly agree respectively.

Correlation: SNSs attachment variables.

Measures	Everyday activity	Proud to be using	Feel out of touch	Part of SNS community
Everyday activity	1			
Proud to be using	0.447**	1		
Feel out of touch	0.111	0.104	1	
Part of the SNS community	0.289**	0.333**	-0.32	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The two-tailed correlation illustrates the significance of frequency of using SNS. The respondents think that SNS is part of their everyday activities which means that they use SNS to share their daily activities, moments, status updates, share picture and other information. Everyday activity shows positive significance with feeling proud by using SNS, which suggests that SNS users feel different and elevated in the society by using their favorite site. Furthermore, SNS community shows significance relationship with everyday activity and feeling proud of using SNS, these relations imply users not only feel proud being part of SNS larger community but also actively and regularly engage in different activities online to be the part of larger SNS community.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

This study was conducted to see the trends of using SNSs among the students of a large public sector university of Pakistan. According to results users were having account on their favourite SNSs i.e. Facebook and Twitter which they frequently surfed through, at least they logged-on once a day by spending more than 15 minutes. Interestingly all the respondents had somehow account on SNSs which might be due to studying in a university because across the world college students are believed to be the regular users of SNSs. Mostly students being new to the university environment try to connect with their college mates to share and gain information regarding their classes and other academic activities. Students were also found to engage in bridging social capital by adding new and strange contacts to their online friendship circle. Furthermore, users were also agree that social media is their part of daily activity. It showed that social media network is famous among university students but there is need that students should use in positive way and get latest information about different issues and its solutions.

In the end, this study is having some limitations too. Our sample was university students so our findings could not be generalized to other social settings. Further, such kind of study could be carried out in other areas of the social institutions such as teenagers, gender based studies, marketing trends and so on.

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