Facebook Usage for Educational Purposes

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ABSTRACT

Facebook offers an online platform which users can use for various purposes besides socializing. Majority of students use Facebook for entertainment rather than for education. Thus, Facebook is seen to have negative effects to learning. Some researchers have found that Facebook can affect academic achievements negatively. Yet others have shown that Facebook can provide opportunities to interact positively by promoting collaborative and cooperative learning to enhance learning outcomes. This study investigates the influence of Facebook on students' attitude towards learning with the purpose of identifying the reasons that contribute to the impact of Facebook towards education among undergraduate students and the relationship between the use of Facebook and the academic performance. The research method applied is quantitative by using a survey for 30 undergraduates from different study programs. The data collected was analysed using descriptive analytical methods. The study found that there were a number of educational activities via Facebook that were done aside from using it for entertainment purposes and socializing.

Keywords: Facebook. Education. Socializing. Quantitative study

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INTRODUCTION

The social networking site is an online site that individuals use to build and reflect social relations in accordance with their interests (Aydin, 2012). Twitter, Facebook, and Google+ are examples of current social networking sites. These days, Facebook, which is a popular social networking service, is used by many online users to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what is going on in the world, and to share and express matters. Rhoades et al (2008, as cited in Aydin, 2012) revealed that the primary users of social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace are students. This is further supported by Heiberger and Harper (2008, as cited in Aydin, 2012), that with more than 100 million active users, Facebook owns an 85% market share of four-year college students and universities in the US. As cited in Aydin (2012), a study conducted by Kolek and Saunders (2008) found that a vast majority of students at public universities have Fcebook accounts.

These students who are actively using Facebook, do so focusing on updating their profiles and sharing their pictures. They spend time connecting with friends and sharing information that are entertaining in nature rather than academic. Hence, there are some quarters who believe that Facebook has negative impact on students' academic performances (Hew, 2011; Junco, 2012; Krischner & Karpinski,2010). It is said that more time spent on Facebook will account for less academic time which leads to poor Grade Point Average (GPA).

According to Skues, Williams and Wise (2012), there are two factors that dictate students' use of Facebook. Firstly, the open concept used in Facebook that enables a broader range of interest group to share and express their interests in the group. Secondly, the absence of offline friends or lack of face-to-face friends which can lead to loneliness, can draw interest to the use of Facebook.

Current research suggests that Facebook gives positive impact towards academic performance. Mazman and Usluel (2010) assert that social networking sites like Facebook help support educational activities by making interaction, collaboration, active participation, information and resource sharing and critical thinking possible. They further state that Facebook can be used as a platform for peer feedback. More importantly, adopting Facebook as an educational tool will support communication skills, collaboration, information sharing and students' positive reaction of enjoyment in learning. In other words, learning is taken out of the mundane classrooms as virtual classrooms provide for wider information resources and wider network of individuals. This in effect is time and cost saving.

In another study by Kabilan, Ahmad, Jafre and Abidin (2010), it was discovered that Facebook can enable useful and meaningful learning that can support, enhance and strengthen the learning of the English language. By means of Facebook, it was found that students have less anxiety communicating their thoughts in English as there is no fear of making grammatical errors. Through Facebook, interaction in English is encouraged indirectly and students are able to gain knowledge and language skills from native speakers of English through communications with them. This boosts self-confidence in using English and is good practice for real-life situations. Undeniably then, Facebook can affect students' academic achievement. As such, this

study intends to investigate the influence of Facebook on academic performance of the students with focus on whether Facebook can be used effectively for learning sessions.

Problem Statement

With the advancement of technology, educators have come to realize that using technological tools to enhance learning can serve to provide great benefits. While some educators are still sceptical to the use of technology in the classrooms, others have thrived and benefited in the ease of access to information and the opportunities to provide feedbacks to their students (Soo et al., 2013). Social networking sites like Facebook however, has been seen to be a social site to make friends and stay connected with them instead of as an educational tool. Changing educational scenes, has brought about exploring different avenues to reach students. Facebook has been seen as a platform which more than 100 million users log on to daily. These users are mainly students and therefore tapping onto Facebook as a means to reaach out to these users seems viable. This study would hence look into the utilization of Facebook as a tool for education purposes in the hope that Facebook will or can help students to perform even better in their studies. However, educators' perceptions towards the benefits of using Facebook might not be the same with the students' views on it. Thus, this study intends to discover whether what educators perceive as beneficial is the same as what the students feel.

Objectives

This study aims to identify the impact of using Facebook for educational purposes among undergraduates and also the perception of undergraduates towards the effects of Facebook on their Grade Point Average (GPA). Given that Facebook is frequently visited by students and is the largest social networking site worldwide, it is important for students and lecturers alike to make full use of its capabilities in enhancing learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used quantitative method via questionnaires which were given to respondents. The findings were tabulated using a descriptive analysis and presented in the form of pie chart and bar graph. The survey was conducted using a sample size of 30 respondents which were selected using the convenient non-random sampling method. The respondents were mainly UiTM Johor undergraduates from different degree courses. They consisted seven male and 23 female respondents within the age range of 20 to 27 years old.

This survey method study uses a questionnaire consisting of 30 items. The items were divided into three sections and the questions were tabulated based on yes no type items, likert scale items and MCQ items.

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents during class session and data collected were then tabulated and analysed using microsoft excel for frequency and percentages in a descriptive analysis manner.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study looked at the impact of using Facebook for educational purposes and the perception towards using Facebook as an educational tool. In general, the data gathered revealed that most students have active Facebook accounts. Besides that, it also showed that there is great potential in using Facebook as a means for gaining information. Students are able to update themselves with current news around the world and this can be seen to facilitate learning as they gain world knowledge. However, this method is relatively new in the education system and the use for Facebook in terms of education has yet a lot more to explore.
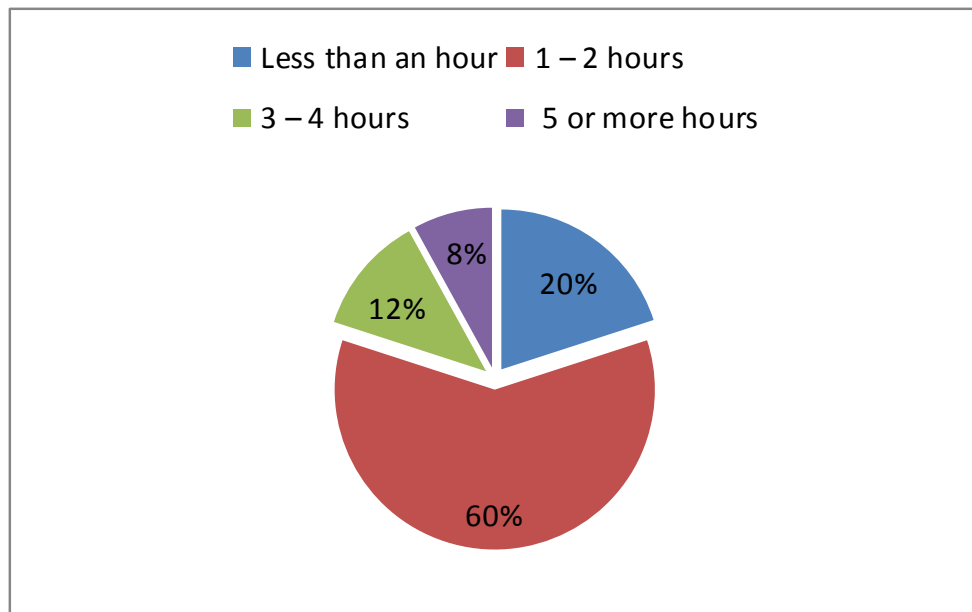
Figure 1: Duration logged on to Facebook

Figure 1 shows the duration of time students spent to log on to Facebook. The findings revealed that 60% of them spent between one to two hours daily on Facebook while 20% spent less than an hour on Facebook. Another 12% of students would spend three to four hours and 8% spent five hours or more on Facebook alone. This suggested that on a daily basis, a majority of students would spend between one to two hours only on Facebook.
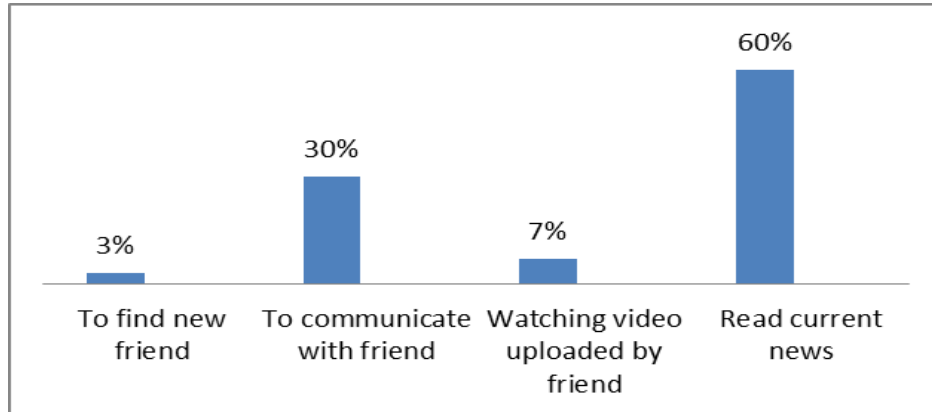
Figure 2: Purpose of using Facebook

Figure 2 illustrates the respondents' purpose of using Facebook. It was found that 60% of the respondents used Facebook to read about current news. Another 30% of the respondents utilize Facebook as a means to communicate with their friends. 7 percent of the respondents stated that Facebook is used to watch videos uploaded by their friends and 3% of them used Facebook with the purpose to find new friends. Hence, it is implied that the main purpose of using Facebook is the get themselves updated with the current news that are happening around them.
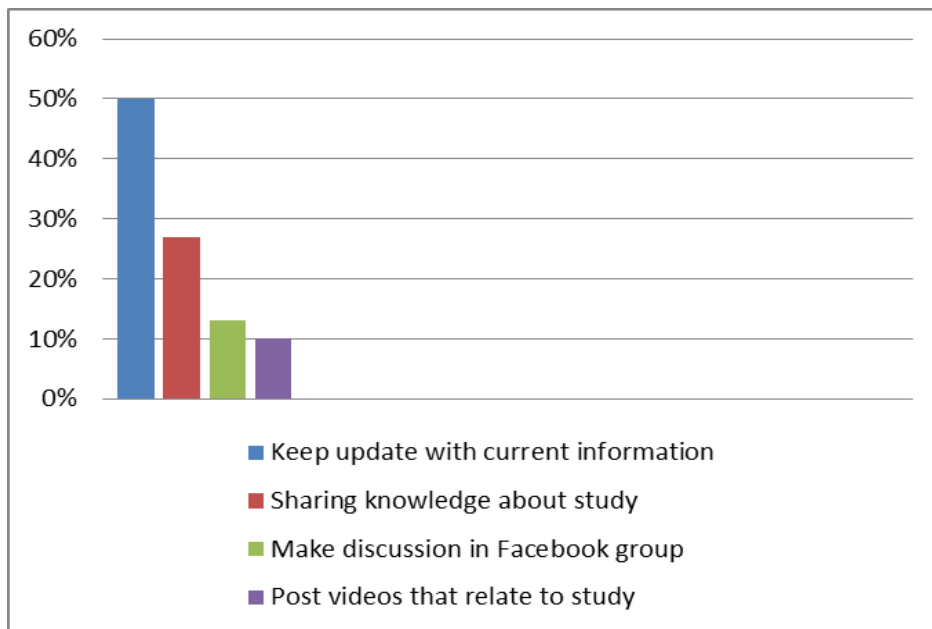

Figure 3: Use of Facebook for learning sessions

Figure 3 indicates the use of Facebook for learning sessions. The findings signified that 50% of the respondents used Facebook to keep themselves updated with current news. It was also found that 27% of respondents chose Facebook as a platform for them to share their knowledge on their

studies. While 13% utilized Facebook to make discussion through Facebook group and 10% would post videos that are related to their studies. Therefore, it is inferred that a vast number of respondents chose to be informed with the recent news by using Facebook as lecturers like to use recent cases or incidents as example in class.
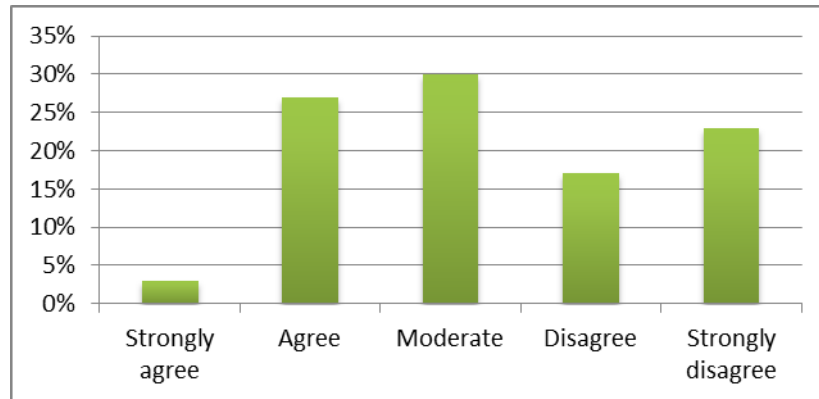

Figure 4: Effect of Facebook to students' Grade Point Average

Figure 4 shows the respondents' views on whether or not Facebook can affect students' Grade Point Average (GPA). The findings acquired revealed that 23% of the respondents were strongly disagreed with the statement while 17% of them disagreed. Another 30% of the respondents were not sure if Facebook gave some effects on their academic performance. Meanwhile, another 27% of the respondents agreed with the statement and 3% of them strongly agreed. Thus, it can be concluded that the students had mixed feelings as to whether Facebook has an effect to their Grade Point Average (GPA)

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the purpose of using Facebook and also undergraduates' perception of whether Facebook affect their Grade Point Average (GPA). Overall, the results were positive as most of the respondents indicated that they used Facebook as a means to search for and read about current news. This suggested that respondents acknowledged Facebook as a good educational tool as they will be updated with recent news which can be shared during the discussion session in class. Moreover, the study also revealed that only one to two hours were used by the respondents to log on to Facebook every day which shows that they do not use most of their time on Facebook alone. Data also showed that the respondents had mixed feelings as to whether Facebook can give effects to their Grade Point Average (GPA).

Although this study was merely a pilot study, it indicates that there are possibilities that Facebook can be a beneficial educational tool for the students. It is recommended that future research to study more on the issue with even more specific research objective or perhaps look at the challenges of employing Facebook as an educational tool.

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