Motives and Characteristics of Facebook Use by Students from a Romanian University

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ABSTRACT

The increasing popularity of Facebook among university students is raising several research questions regarding the characteristics of use. In the context of modern school, the academic use and the usage related to the university context are of special interest. This paper aims at analyzing the motives for the use of Facebook and the characteristics of Facebook use by students from a Romanian university. The results show that the motives of using Facebook are mainly related to communicating with friends, to find out what happens in their university and to keep in touch with former high school colleagues. The results revealed significant differences between male and female students in terms of motives of using, network size, frequency and duration of use. Female students have more Facebook friends and spend more time on Facebook than male students. Moreover, significant differences exist between undergraduate and master students.

Author Keywords

Facebook, social networks, educational use of Facebook, motives of using Facebook.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of Facebook among university students is a provocation for teachers to look for modalities of exploiting the educational potential of social networks. The shift of paradigm from student centered learning to social learning requires new activities such as meeting, chat, active participation, critical thinking, information and resources exchange, collaboration, and debate [1, 3, 14]. This change requires understanding why students use Facebook and the main characteristics of use.

Although the number of Facebook users in Romania continuously increased, very little is known about the reasons why university students spend time on Facebook, about the relationship between Facebook use and their work at university as well as about differences related to enrollment (college / master), and gender. It is worthy to mention that despite the well-known gender differences, the studies carried on in other countries rarely report the network size, frequency and duration of use by gender.

Based on two qualitative studies carried on in Lithuania and Romania, a questionnaire was developed and tested during a pilot study [13]. The questionnaire was revised and then administrated again in 2015 in Romania.

This paper presents an analysis of reasons why university students use Facebook and an analysis of differences by gender and programme of study. The sample was collected in March 2015 at the Academy of Economic Studies (ASE) in Bucharest.

The following research questions are guiding this study:

- Which are the motives of using Facebook by university students and to what extent are these related to the university context?
- Which is the average size of Facebook friends network and how many of them are students?
- How often do university students log on Facebook and how much time do they spend daily?
- Which are the variations of use by programme of study (college / master) and gender?

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The following section briefly presents recent researches in the social networking sites with an emphasis on Facebook use. Next, the method and variables used in this study are described. Afterwards, the results are presented and analyzed. The paper ends with conclusion and future research directions.

RELATED WORK

As shown by Brown & Adler [3], the development of students' communities is as important as the access to the educational content. Social networking websites support students to develop the skills they need in a community of practice. Facebook enables users to create a profile that represents them and to present their concerns, activity and opinions in an open space.

According to Selwyn [14] Facebook is an open space for informal education, an arena where students have the possibility to present their identity and model their behavior. He argues that Facebook stimulates critical thinking since students can analyze and share opinions as regarding various situations that occur in their university.

The study of Ellison et al. [5] reports a positive association between the students' perception as regarding the social capital and the satisfaction with life in university, which suggests a positive influence of Facebook for the integration and participation in a university community.

Valenzuela et al. [15] found a positive relation between the intensity of use on one side, and the social trust, civic engagement, and political participation, on the other side.

Park et al. [11] found four primary needs for joining Facebook groups: socialization, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information. Using a sample of 1715 college students they found that these gratifications vary on gender, home-town and year in school.

Lampe et al. [10] analyzed the perceptions of users as regarding the value of Facebook as information source. The study reveals the specific way in which users are converting their social capital in information and concludes that the information usefulness and seeking behavior are positively associated with their perception regarding the social capital.

Junco [8] analyzed the relationship between the frequency of Facebook use, participation in Facebook activities, and time spent on curricular and co-curricular activities. The results show that Facebook is positively influencing the time spent on co-curricular activities.

The study of Arteaga-Sanchez et al. [1] shows that Facebook could support collaborative and cooperative learning. In this respect, teachers should analyze how students interact with the technology and the ways in which Facebook could support social learning and enrich the learning experience.

Lamanuskas et al. [9] analyzed the use of social networking websites by university students from five countries: Lithuania, Romania, Czech Republic, Turkey, and Ukraine. Most of students (74.4%) are visiting daily a social networking website. The most frequently mentioned motives are communication, learning new things and information exchange, photos and videos sharing.

Following the data provided by Facebrands.ro [6], the number of Facebook users in Romania was eight millions in March 2015 which represents a penetration rate of 39.76%. The highest adoption rate is in the range of 15-24 years (33.12%), which means that a young person out of three has a Facebook account.

In Romania, Bălțărețu & Balaban [2] used a focus-group method to investigate the use of social networking websites by young people and concluded that the main reasons are related to social aspects: need of communication, socialization, and participation in collective actions. Popa & Marhan [12] explored the creative potential of the students that are using Facebook. The results show that Facebook plays a central role in students' concerns and the exchange of information content generated by other people prevails over the generation of new content. The study of Grosseck et al. [7] focuses on how students perceive the use of Facebook for academic purposes. Their results show that the majority of students spend significant time on Facebook more for social uses and less for academic purposes.

METHOD

Sample

The questionnaire in Romanian has been administrated to university students from ASE Bucharest in March 2015. Students were asked to answer general questions (faculty, programme of study, year of study, age, and gender), questions regarding the use of Facebook (network size, frequency, and duration of use), and then to evaluate several items on 7-points Likert scale.

From the total of 451 questionnaires received a number of 37 were eliminated because of incomplete data. The working sample has 414 observations, from which 156

men and 258 women. The age of participants is varying between 18 and 37 years with a mean of 21.28 years (SD=2.78). Most of the participants (368) are students at Cybernetics, Statistics and Economic Informatics (CSIE) faculty and the rest of 46 at Marketing faculty. As regarding the study programme, 313 are college students and 101 master students.

Variables

This paper examined a part of a larger data set collected on Facebook users students. Two categories of variables are analyzed that refer to the motives for using Facebook (Table 1) and the characteristics of usage (Table 2).

Table 1. Motives for using Facebook

Item	Statement
FBU1	I use Facebook to present myself
FBU2	I use Facebook to find out what happens in my university
FBU3	I use Facebook to get in touch with new people
FBU4	I use Facebook to get advice about something I am interested into
FBU5	I use Facebook to get access at shared resources
FBU6	I use Facebook to participate in group discussions
FBU7	I use Facebook to keep in touch with former high-school colleagues
FBU8	I use Facebook to locate old friends
FBU9	I use Facebook to communicate with my friends
FBU10	I use Facebook to find out what is new and innovative

Six variables are related to the university context and information (FBU1, FBU2, FBU4, FBU5, FBU6, and FBU10). The rest of four variables refer to communication and socialization (FBU3, FBU7, FBU8, and FBU9).

Table 2. Characteristics of usage

Variable	Questions
FBF	How many FB friends do you have in your FB network ?
FBFS	How many of your FB friends are university students ?
FBFSU	How many of your FB friends are students in this university ?
DaysWeek	How many days per week do you use FB ?
LogDay	How many times per day do you log on FB ?
MinDay	On average, how many minutes per day do you actually use FB ?

The characteristics of Facebook usage are related to the network size, frequency and duration of use.

Data analysis

The collected data was analysed using SPSS 16.0. The statistical tools used in this study include descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and one-way ANOVA.

RESULTS

Motives of using Facebook

As shown in Table 3, the motives of using Facebook are mainly related to communicate with friends (FBU9), to find out what happens in university (FBU2), and to keep

in touch with former colleagues (FBU7). Next four reasons are to get access at shared resources (FBU5), to participate in group discussions (FBU6) and to locate old friends (FBU8), and to find out what is new (FBU10). Although the order of preferences suggests that social motives prevails, it can be noticed a positive perception of Facebook as a potential support for social learning. The answers at three questions have mean values bellow 4.00, showing the university students are less interested to use Facebook to present themselves (FBU1), to get in touch with new people (FBU3), and to get advice (FBU4).

Table 3 shows that for all variables female students scored higher than male students. To test whether there were any differences in the mean ratings of motivations between male and female students, one-way ANOVA tests were performed. There were statistically significant differences between male and female in all variables, excepting for FBU1, FBU3 and FBU6. Highest differences are noticed for FBU8 and FBU7, suggesting that female students are more interested than male students to locate old friends and keep in touch with former high school mates.

Table 3. Motives for using Facebook: differences between male and females students

Variable	All	Male (156)	Female (258)	F	p
FBU1	2.80	2.72	2.86	0.742	.389
FBU2	5.31	4.82	5.61	24.470	.000
FBU3	3.57	3.56	3.58	0.013	.911
FBU4	3.94	3.61	4.14	9.248	.003
FBU5	4.90	4.45	5.18	21.835	.000
FBU6	4.81	4.60	4.94	3.851	.050
FBU7	5.02	4.50	5.34	25.689	.000
FBU8	4.58	4.01	4.92	27.295	.000
FBU9	5.76	5.54	5.88	5.378	.021
FBU10	4.51	4.05	4.79	18.522	.000

The mean and standard deviation values by study programme are presented in Table 4. The three most important reasons to use Facebook are the same for college and master student (FBU9, FBU2 and FBU7). College students have a higher perception for all variables.

Table 4. Motives for using Facebook: differences between college and master students

Variable	College (313)	Master (101)	F	p
FBU1	2.88	2.56	3.073	.080
FBU2	5.38	5.09	2.546	.111
FBU3	3.73	3.07	11.257	.001
FBU4	4.10	3.44	11.589	.001
FBU5	5.03	4.52	7.820	.005
FBU6	5.00	4.25	15.150	.000
FBU7	5.11	4.77	3.002	.084
FBU8	4.68	4.25	4.610	.032
FBU9	5.86	5.45	6.217	.013
FBU10	4.57	4.33	1.536	.216

To test whether there were any differences in the mean ratings of motivations between college students and master students, one-way ANOVA tests were performed. The analysis revealed no differences between college and master in FBU1, FBU2, FBU7, and FBU10. In contrast, is a significant difference in all other motivations. Highest differences are noticed for FBU6, FBU3, and FBU4, suggesting that college students are more interested than master students to participate in group discussions, to get in touch with new people, and to get advice.

Network size

As regarding the network size, the number of Facebook friends is large. About 32% of respondents have between 500 and 1000 friends and about 22% over 1000 friends. The number of friends that are students is about twice smaller, 33% of students having in their Facebook network between 250 and 500 students and 24% over 500 friends. The mean number of students at this university has a weight of 19.38% in the Facebook network.

The number of Facebook friends is varying between 7 and 5000, with a mean value of 840.60 (SD=825.69). The number of friends which are students is varying between 7 and 2000 (M=419.64, SD=409.69), which represents about half of the mean number of FB friends. From these, 38.8% are students at ASE (M=162.92, SD=176.12).

Female students have more Facebook friends. To test whether there were any differences in the mean ratings of the network size between male and female students, one-way ANOVA tests were performed. The results revealed a significant difference between male and female students in terms of network size for all variables (Table 5).

Table 5. Network size differences between male and females students

Variable	Male (156)	Female (258)	F	p
FBF	695.55	928.30	7.86	.005
FBFS	316.04	482.28	16.61	.000
FBFSU	127.49	184.33	10.36	.001

Furthermore, the analysis revealed a significant difference between college and master students with regard to number of friends (F=5.89, p=.016) and number of student friends (F=5.82, p=.016). Analysis revealed no difference with regard to number of friends studying at the same university (F=2.10, p=.148).

Frequency and duration of use

The frequency of use is varying between a day and seven days per week (M=6.57, SD=1.18), which shows that most of the university students are using Facebook daily. As regarding the daily use, few students are logging on Facebook once (4.6%) or twice (11.8%). Most of them are logging on three times per day or more (55.1%), while 118 students (28.5%) are continuously logged on. The average amount of time spent per day is varying between 2 and 600 minutes (M=108.04, SD=109.37).The mean number of minutes per day is pretty high: 52.7% up to one hour, 25.8% between one and two hours, and 21.5% over three hours. The intense use of Facebook should not be surprising. Similar situations have been reported in other countries [4].

Female students log on Facebook more often and spend more time on Facebook than male students. To test whether were any differences in the mean ratings of the reported usage between male and female, one-way

ANOVA tests were performed. The results revealed a significant difference between male and female students in terms of reported usage for all variables (Table 6).

Table 6. Reported usage differences between male and females students

Variable	Male (156)	Female (258)	F	p
DaysWeek	6.24	6.77	20.47	.000
LogDay	2.96	3.15	6.24	.013
MinDay	84.20	122.46	12.22	.001

Moreover, reported data showed that the college students log on more often and spend more time on Facebook than master students. A one-way ANOVA showed that differences are statistically significant for the number of days per week (F=5.14, p=.024) and the number of minutes per day (F=7.41, p=.007).

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of the motives and characteristics of Facebook use by university students in Romania. The results show they use Facebook especially to communicate with friends, to find out what happens in their university, and to keep in touch with former high school colleagues. The gender analysis shows significant differences between female and male students. Female students are more interested than male students to locate old friends and keep in touch with former high school mates.

The analysis by programme of study shows higher mean values for college students than for master students. Although several differences exist that are statistically significant is not possible to draw a conclusion regarding the usage behavior since Facebook penetration might be different from generation to generation.

Female students log on Facebook more often and spend more time on Facebook than male students. The frequency and duration of use show an intense use that might have negative effects on the students' academic performance. The characteristics of Facebook use by university students should challenge teachers to find ways to orient the use for academic purposes. In this respect, the relatively large number of Facebook friends from the same university is an argument towards the educational use.

There are inherent limitations of the study. The sample is from one university and most students are from the same faculty. The perceptions might differ according to the university / faculty profile. Future research may study Facebook motives and usage from a cross-cultural perspective to identify patterns.

To have a wider and more complete perspective on Facebook use by university students a larger sample is needed. Next studies will collect samples for several universities and focus on the analysis of variation by profile (technical, economics, and social sciences), programme, and year of study.

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