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Social network sites usage habits of undergraduate students: case study of Facebook

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Abstract

The usage of social network sites is increasing daily. Facebook, which is a popular social network site, is one of the most commonly used social sharing sites today, having millions of users. The aim of this study was to investigate the Facebook usage of students and also to learn which Facebook tools the participants preferred. Eighty six volunteer undergraduate students participated in the present study. The data obtained by the survey was analyzed and commented upon using the SPSS program with the percentage, frequency, and mean statistical analysis techniques. As the results show, students spend a significant amount of their times using the Facebook. Participants use Messages, Chat, Friends, Links, News and Photos tools are the most commonly used tools of Facebook. In addition, Facebook provides individuals with a way of maintaining and strengthening social ties, which can be beneficial in both social and academic settings. Future studies should concentrate on integrating the Facebook into education and teaching, which is important in students' everyday working lives.
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1. Introduction

Students are heavily immersed in Web 2.0 technologies (i.e. Facebook, twitter, podcasts, wikis, blogs, virtual worlds, video sharing and photo sharing). They are crafting on-line lives that seamlessly meld with their off-line world. Indeed, the internet is playing an increasingly important role in not only students' social life, but also academic. Educators are now turning to Web 2.0 tools, drawing upon their ability to assist in creating, collaborating on and sharing content. As a result of this the usage of social sharing sites are increasing daily (Uzunboylu, Bicen & Cavus, 2011; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Selwyn, 2007). Social network sites, as web based services, allow users to make open or semi-open profiles within the systems they are part of, to see list of other people in the group, and to see the relations of people within different groups. The terminology and structure of such communication networks are different between different sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Facebook, which is a popular social network site, is one of the most commonly used social sharing sites today, having millions of users (Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Bicen & Cavus, 2010; Ross et al., 2009; Cain, 2008). Today, Facebook has more than 750 million active users and 50% of them log on to Facebook in any given day (Facebook, 2011). Facebook is quickly turning into one of the most popular tools for social communication (Ross et al., 2009). Facebook is essentially an online social network site in

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which individuals can share photographs, personal information, and join groups of friends with one another (Cabada et al., 2009; Buckman, 2005;). Many users can share parts of their daily activities with their friends or family using the Facebook. There are several ways for users to communicate with one another on Facebook. Users can send private messages to other individuals. This capability is similar to e-mailing (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Users can also make use of the Wall function. A wall is a space on the profile, similar to a notice board or a public forum where users can post short messages or add photographs, music or video clips to share information (Ross et al., 2009; West, Lewis & Currie, 2009). However, at present, little empirical research has been conducted on the value of Web 2.0 in education (Crook & Harrison, 2008). As a result of this, it is a necessity that research should be carried out in this field.

2. The aim of the research

The aim of this study was to investigate the Facebook usage of students and also to find out which Facebook tools the participants preferred. The study attempted to find answers to the following questions:

1- What are the Facebook used places?
2- What are the Facebook usage habits of students' hours/day?
3- What are the most preferred Facebook tools usage habits of students?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Eighty six volunteer undergraduate students at a Near East University from Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (CEIT) in Northern Cyprus participated in the present study. The sample was comprised of 71% male and 29% female. The study was conducted during the 2010-2011 Fall term.

3.2. Instruments

Data was collected by means of an online survey developed by the researchers. The survey consisted of two sections. In the first section demographic characteristics of students and also length of time spent in Facebook were collected. The second section was consisted of items related to preferences of students for using a Facebook tools. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.90.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data was collected using the developed scale. The data obtained by the survey was analyzed and commented upon using the SPSS program with the percentage, frequency, and mean statistical analysis techniques.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1. Facebook used place

According to the Figure 1, 29% of the participants use Facebook at home, 22% of them use the Facebook through their mobile phone, 20% of them use Facebook at café/restaurants, 17% of them use the Facebook at University, 7% of them use Facebook at Internet Café, 5% of them use the Facebook at working place. When the results were examined, it was observed that 29% use the Facebook at home and 22% use the Facebook via mobile phone without any place restriction. Facebook (2011) announced that there are more than 250 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices.
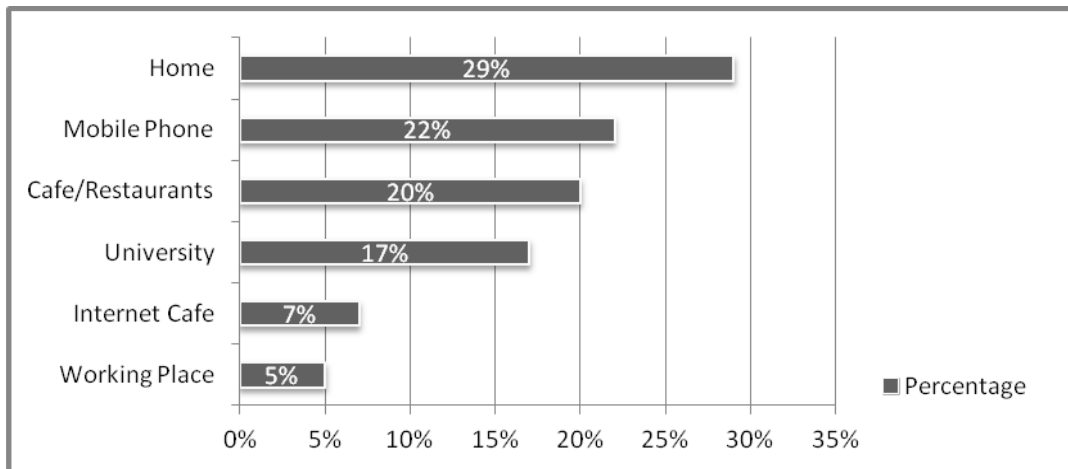
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Figure 1. Distribution of Facebook used place

4.2. Facebook usage habits of students' hours/day

As indicated in Figure 2, 24% of the participants use Facebook for one hour per day, 28% of them use Facebook for 2 hours per day, 16% of them use the Facebook for three hours per day, 32% of them use the Facebook for more than four hours in a day. Examination of results revealed that most of the participants, corresponding to a percentage of 32%, use the Facebook for more than 4 hours in a day. In addition, results showed that most of the undergraduate students spend a considerable time on the Facebook. In contrast, Ross et al. (2009) defined that 79% of the students use Facebook approximately for an hour during the day. Similarly, Ellison et al (2007) suggested that the undergraduate students were spending only 10-30 min online on Facebook every day.
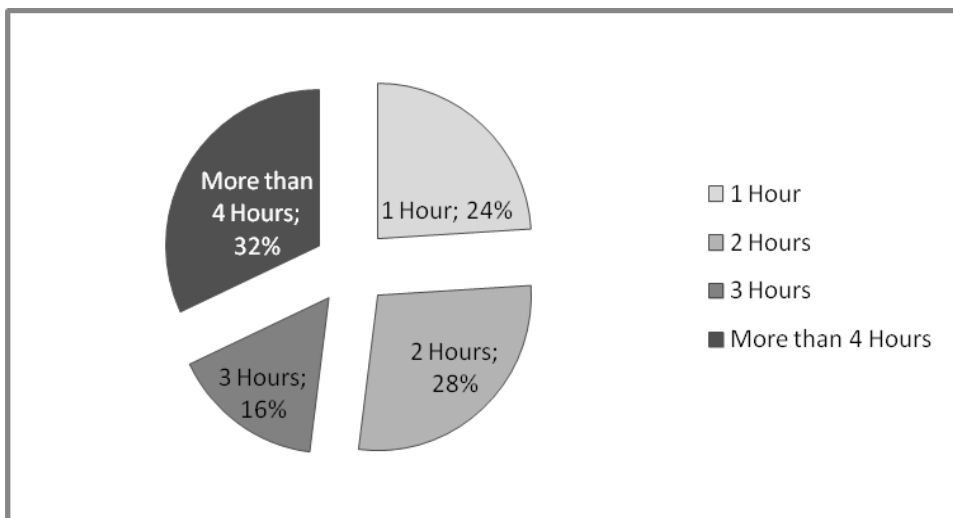

Figure 2. Distribution of Facebook usage habits of students hours/day

4.3. The most preferred Facebook tools usage habits of students

As can be seen from the Figure 3, according to the survey, Messages (X=3.73), Chat (X=3.73), Friends (X=3.70), Links (X=3.58), News (X=3.52) and Photos (X=3.24) tools are the most commonly used tools of Facebook by the participants. Games (X=2.72), Questions (X=2.68) and Groups (X=2.63) tools of Facebook are used on a medium basis, Events (X=2.37), Pages (X=2.10) and Notes (X=1.98) tools of Facebook are the least preffered tools by students. According to Figure 3, it can be said that students mostly use the communication tools

of Facebook. Students establish communication with their friends or families using the message and chat tools of Facebook. One can argue that, after students establish communication using these tools, they use links and photos with the aid of news tools in order to enhance their communications (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008). In addition, students use applications and tools such as games, and questions. It can be assumed that, students use these tools in their spare times, and these tools can help them increase their knowledge, concentration, research abilities, and motivation. In a study, Ross et al. (2009) reported that using the Facebook tools increase students' motivations. The Facebook tools used the least by students are the events, pages and notes.
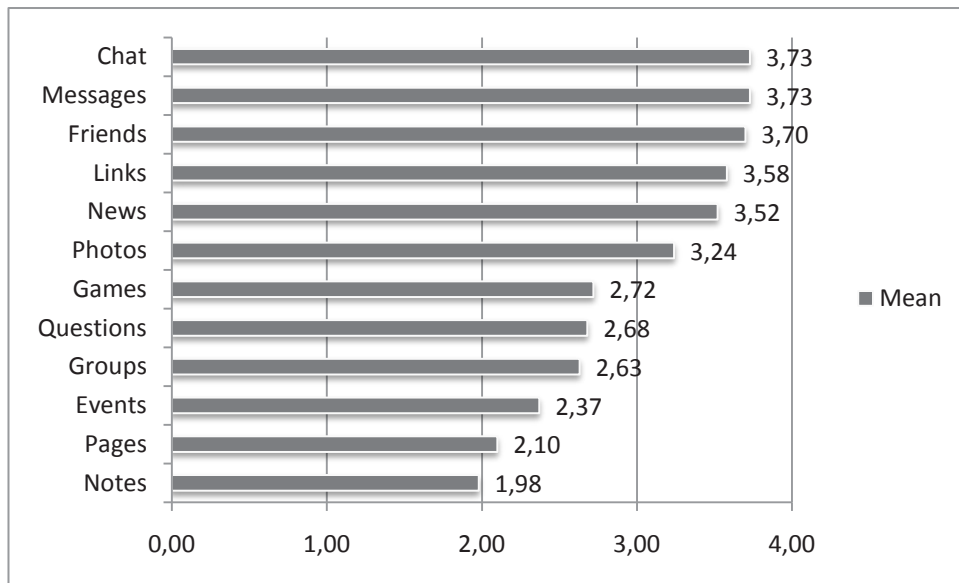

Figure 3. Distribution of the most preferred Facebook tools usage habits of students

5. Conclusion

The usage of the Facebook is increasing daily. As the results show, students spend a significant amount of their times using the Facebook. As a consequence of this increase in usage, students are establishing communication with people in their environments. Students increase their knowledge and communication skills by sharing photographs, links that they like, and news with their friends. Future studies should concentrate on integrating the Facebook into education and teaching, which is important in students' everyday working lives.

In addition, Facebook provides individuals with a way of maintaining and strengthening social ties, which can be beneficial in both social and academic settings.

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