



TERTIARY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS USING SNS

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Abstract

Social Network Sites (SNS, particularly Facebook, and Twitter) have been widely used by the tertiary students mainly for social purposes. In other words, university students make extensive use of SNS in order to meet their socialization needs. However, SNS also caters for educational needs. The present paper explores the views of the tertiary students who study at the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies at the Eastern Mediterranean University in the 2011-2012 academic year with respect to the use of SNS for meeting their social and educational needs.

Recently, Social Network Sites (SNS) have become an indispensable part of young people's lives. Starting with Six Degrees.com in 1997, the variety of Social Network Sites flourished. Today, Facebook is the most popular of Social Network Sites. Started as a student project 'Facemash' in Harvard University by Mark Zuckerberg, soon Facebook spread to the world and became very popular all around it. Internet World Statistics conducted by Miniwatts Marketing group reveals that, in the world, among all the countries where Facebook is widely used, Turkey has the fourth rank as Facebook user country; among the cities, Istanbul has the second rank after Jakarta, Indonesia (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>).

Facebook is used for communicating with friends and family as well as making new friends. Facebook has been used not only to contact with the friends and reach old acquaintances, but also to share the stories that range from personal accounts to sharing videos. Advanced technology that enables the use of the Internet and SNS by mobile devices such as the i-phone, and i-pad have increased the use of SNS. The widespread use of the Facebook and SNS in general, particularly by young people, lead the researchers to investigate whether they cause addiction in tertiary students (Teke, 2011) or whether they are used to meet the tertiary students' attachment needs (Uygarer, 2011). Teke points out that the tertiary students use the Facebook extensively, however, this cannot be considered addiction. Uygarer, on the other hand, explains that SNS is used by the tertiary students to meet their attachment needs. Comparing the senior and freshman students, she maintains that freshman students use the SNS to meet their attachment needs more than the senior students. Göker, Demir and Doğan (2010) also investigate the use of the Facebook by the tertiary students. They conclude that the Facebook is widely used by the university students, yet, it is considered to be a distrustful environment.

Research into Communication and Media Studies started at the outset of the 20th century and the first most significant theory is Hypodermic Needle Theory (Lasswell). During this period, as a result of the Hypodermic Needle Theory, it was believed that media had direct influence on the audience. Lazarsfeld, on the other hand, with two-step flow of communication suggests that audience is more influenced when the information is presented to them by the community leaders rather than directly by the media. Both of these initial theories suggest that the audience is passive. In the 1940, Uses and Gratifications Theory started to develop. Following the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, E., Blumer, J. G., & Gurevitch, M., 1974), the audience started to be considered as active. Uses and Gratifications Theory focuses on: (1) The social and psychological origins of (2) needs which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones (Katz, E., Blumer, J. G., & Gurevitch, M., 1974, p.20). Kayhara and Wellman (2007) maintain that users have two types of gratifications from the media: Content gratification and process gratification. Content gratification is related to the information users get from the Internet. Process gratification on the other hand, is about the action of creation such as creating a profile. They further point out that at times content and process gratifications may overlap. In a nutshell, Uses and Gratifications Theory assumes that the audience is active and they use the media according to their goals. The choice of medium resides with the audience. With the widespread use of the Internet, Uses and Gratifications started to gain more attention in the Communication and Media Studies.

Methodology

The present study is a descriptive study and it sets out to explore to what extent the tertiary students use the SNS and whether they use the SNS to gratify their educational needs in addition to socialization needs. The study takes place in the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies at the Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus. The sample of the study is selected randomly among the students studying at the Eastern Mediterranean University and random sampling strategy is used. Approximately 20 % of Faculty student population is selected as the sample.

For the present study a questionnaire comprising 58 questions was prepared. The first part aimed at collecting demographic information about the participants. The second part sought to collect information about the use of social network sites and the third part set out to shed light on the attitudes of students towards social network sites in relation to the uses and gratifications they acquire. For the sustainability of the whole sample, a factor analysis is run for all Likert Scale type questions (43 in number). The alpha coefficient of reliability level for all Likert Scale type questions on the questionnaire is 0.911 which shows perfect reliability of the data collection instrument.

The first part comprises four questions: sex, age, nationality, and the year of study in the faculty. 46 % of participants are male and 54 % of participants are female. 34 % are 18-21 years old, 45 % are 21-24 years old, 14 % are 24-27 years old and 7 % are above 27 years old. 78 % of the participants are Turkish Republic citizens, 21 % of the participants are Turkish Cypriots and 1 % of students are from the other countries. 29 % are first year, 18 % are second year, 31 % are third year and 22 % are fourth year students. The second part consists of 11 questions. The first question is related to the use of the Internet in a day. 11 % stated that they used the Internet less than an hour a day; 27 % used the Internet 1-2 hours; 29 % used the Internet 2-4 hours and the rest 33 % used the Internet more than 4 hours. The participants were also asked for what purpose they used the Internet. 45 % mentioned that they used the Internet in their free time, 27 % for enjoying themselves, 4 % for shopping, 24 % for research and gaining information.

To the question 'on which sites do you spend time on the Internet?' the participants answered as follows: 62 % on Social Network Sites, 8 % on blogs, 19 % on search engines; and 11 % on other aspects. When the participants were asked which one(s) of the Social Network Sites they followed, their responses are as follows: 78 % Facebook, 14 % Twitter, 5 % Youtube and 3 % MySpace. To the question for what purpose do you use the Social Network Sites they answered as follows: 48 % for meeting my friends, 31 % for following the agenda (daily events/news), 15 % watching video and listening to music and 6 % for conducting research. 62 % indicated that Social Network Sites would be beneficial for their education and 38 % said the opposite. When the participants were asked whether they used the Social Network Sites for educational purposes or not 64 % said yes and 36 % said no. In relation to the reliability of the information gained from the Social Network Sites, 55 % indicated that they found this information reliable but 45 % mentioned that they did not find this information reliable. Another question asked which Social Network Sites they used for educational purposes: 43 % mentioned they used Facebook, 39 % Youtube, 15 % Twitter and 3 % MySpace. Another question asked was related to which areas of their education they found Social Network Sites beneficial. 42 % mentioned that they could find information about the agenda (daily events/news), 30 % pointed out that they could



find people related to their topic of interest, 17 % maintained that they could read comments related to the field, and 11 % mentioned that they could research the topic of their interest without getting bored. The students were also asked how they were influenced from the information obtained from the Social Network Sites. 45 % mentioned that they were influenced positively, 30 % had no idea, 13 % were negatively influenced and 12 % were undecided about the topic. Finally, in this section they were asked for the educational purposes, how frequently they used the Social Network Sites; the responses are as follows: 24 % less than an hour, 35 % 1-2 hours, 22 % 2-3 hours per day and 19 % once a week.

The rest of the study consists of 43 Likert Scale type questions. For these questions 1 indicates Strongly Agree; 2 Agree; 3 Undecided; 4 Disagree and 5 Strongly Disagree. For the scale division, recommendations of Balcı (2004) have been followed and intervals are taken as follows: 1-1.79 Strongly Agree; 1.80-2.59 Agree; 2.60-3.39 Undecided; 3.40-4.19 Disagree and 4.20 – 5 Strongly Disagree.

Table 1 Students' attitudes towards SNS

No	Statement	Mean	Attitude
1	Information I obtained from the Social Network Sites are long lasting.	2.30	A
2	The illustrations I see on the SNS help me to keep the information I get.	2.16	A
3	Continuous updating of information helps me to have new information.	2.11	A
4	Integrating SNS to university education is significant.	2.45	A
5	I always comment on the education related topics I see on the SNS.	2.78	U
6	I am always interested in the messages which contain education related content.	2.35	A
7	I share the education related information I obtain from the SNS with my friends.	2.54	A
8	I believe that SNS contribute to learning.	2.43	A
9	On the SNS, I subscribe to education related sites.	2.92	U
10	I reach information related to my education through SNS.	2.85	U
11	I use SNS to follow the daily news.	2.18	A
12	If I keep away from the SNS, I would have no information about what is going on around me.	2.93	U
13	SNS sets the agenda.	3.03	U
14	I receive information about social life through the SNS.	2.43	A
15	I obtain information about my close surroundings/circle of friends via SNS.	1.95	A
16	It is fun to obtain information (as news) through the SNS.	2.10	A
17	Since I obtain the news about the people that I am interested in, I find them interesting.	2.10	A
18	I use SNS because it is fun.	1.69	SA
19	SNS make me happy.	1.93	A
20	It is fun to look around on the SNS and check the novelties.	2.02	A
21	I enjoy using the SNS.	2.05	A
22	SNS are something to spend time on.	1.89	A
23	It helps me have fun when I get bored.	1.91	A
24	There is nothing better to do.	2.32	A
25	SNS are exciting.	2.36	A
26	I can always use SNS.	2.24	A
27	I can follow what kinds of novelties there are.	1.98	A
28	I can observe how brave other people are.	2.63	U
29	I can form groups with people who have the same interests as mine.	2.39	A
30	I can express myself freely.	2.43	A
31	I can answer other people's questions.	2.23	A
32	I can feel less lonely.	2.83	U
33	I can contact with my family easily.	2.36	A
34	I can contact with my friends easily.	1.95	A
35	I can reach information easily.	2.11	A
36	I can reach information without paying anything.	2.07	A
37	It is a new research technique.	2.47	A
38	It is an interesting technique of conducting research.	2.34	A
39	I get informed of the daily events.	2.04	A
40	I can move away from the school and lessons.	2.54	A
41	So that I have something common with my friends.	2.34	A
42	I meet new people.	2.48	A
43	I take part in discussions.	2.67	U

Above all, the most striking result obtained from the study is that the university students enjoy SNS because it is fun. The average of the questionnaire item 18 'I use SNS because it is fun' is 1.69 which refers to the attitude 'Strongly Agree'. Apart from this, students agree with 34 of the 43 questionnaire items. (See Table 1 for the averages and attitudes obtained from the various uses of the SNS.) This indicates that they make use of different functions of the SNS. They disagree with questionnaire items 5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 28, 32, 43. Detailed information on the students' attitudes are categorized in relation to topics and are presented below. In relation to reaching information and using the SNS for education, Table 2 summarizes students' attitudes.

Table 2 Students' attitudes towards using the SNS for getting information and using it for education

No	Statement	Mean	Attitude
1	Information I obtained from the Social Network Sites are long lasting.	2.30	A
2	The illustrations I see on the SNS help me to keep the information I get.	2.16	A



3	Continuous updating of information helps me to have new information.	2.11	A
4	Integrating SNS to university education is significant.	2.45	A
5	I always comment on the education related topics I see on the SNS.	2.78	U
6	I am always interested in the messages which contain education related content.	2.35	A
7	I share the education related information I obtain from the SNS with my friends.	2.54	A
8	I believe that SNS contribute to learning.	2.43	A
9	On the SNS, I subscribe to education related sites.	2.92	U
10	I reach information related to my education through SNS.	2.85	U

Table 2 indicates that students trust the information obtained through the SNS yet they are not active in commenting on the educational topics or reaching education related information through the SNS.

Table 3 Students attitudes towards obtaining the news from the SNS

11	I use SNS to follow the daily news.	2.18	A
12	If I keep away from the SNS, I would have no information about what is going on around me.	2.93	U
13	SNS sets the agenda.	3.03	U
14	I receive information about social life through the SNS.	2.43	A
15	I obtain information about my close surroundings/circle of friends via SNS.	1.95	A
16	It is fun to obtain information (as news) through the SNS.	2.10	A
17	Since I obtain the news about the people that I am interested in, I find them interesting.	2.10	A

Students' attitudes presented in Table 3 show that they get and enjoy getting the daily news and news about their friends through the SNS yet are undecided whether SNS sets the agenda or staying away from them would mean they have no information about what is going on.

Table 4 Students' attitudes towards using the SNS for meeting their social needs

18	I use SNS because it is fun.	1.69	SA
19	SNS make me happy.	1.93	A
20	It is fun to look around on the SNS and check the novelties.	2.02	A
21	I enjoy using the SNS.	2.05	A
22	SNS are something to spend time on.	1.89	A
23	It helps me have fun when I get bored.	1.91	A
24	There is nothing better to do.	2.32	A
25	SNS are exciting.	2.36	A
26	I can always use SNS.	2.24	A
27	I can follow what kinds of novelties there are.	1.98	A
28	I can observe how brave other people are.	2.63	U
29	I can form groups with people who have the same interests as mine.	2.39	A
30	I can express myself freely.	2.43	A
31	I can answer other people's questions.	2.23	A
32	I can feel less lonely.	2.83	U
33	I can contact with my family easily.	2.36	A
34	I can contact with my friends easily.	1.95	A
35	I can reach information easily.	2.11	A
36	I can reach information without paying anything.	2.07	A
37	It is a new research technique.	2.47	A
38	It is an interesting technique of conducting research.	2.34	A
39	I get informed of the daily events.	2.04	A
40	I can move away from the school and lessons.	2.54	A
41	So that I have something common with my friends.	2.34	A
42	I meet new people.	2.48	A
43	I take part in discussions.	2.67	U

Table 4 presents students' attitudes towards social use of SNS. They 'Strongly Agree' that they use SNS because it is fun. The findings indicate that being on the SNS makes them happy. Yet they are 'Undecided' about the issues whether using the SNS lead them to observe how brave the other people are, or whether it reduces loneliness or whether they take part in discussions.

Pearson Chi Square test is run to observe whether there is any significant difference among the participants with respect to sex. Only in relation to the questionnaire items 18 'I use SNS because it is fun' (0.08 when $p \leq 0.05$) and 21 'I enjoy using the SNS' (0.023 when $p \leq 0.05$) there is statistically significant difference. With respect to age, statistically significant difference has been observed in 6 questionnaire items. These are: item 10, 'I reach information related to my education through SNS' (0.039 when $p \leq 0.05$); 19 'SNS make me happy' (0.023 when $p \leq 0.05$); 21 'I enjoy using the SNS' (0.048 when $p \leq 0.05$); 23 'It helps me have fun when I get bored' (0.025 when $p \leq 0.05$); 33 'I can contact with my family easily' (0.035 when $p \leq 0.05$); 'I can reach information without paying anything' (0.036 $p \leq 0.05$). As far as the nationality is concerned, the participants are mostly (99 %) Turkish Republic and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus citizens. There is a statistically significant difference in questionnaire items: 'It is exciting' (0.025 when $p \leq 0.05$) and 'I can contact with my family easily' (0.039 when $p \leq 0.05$). There has been no statistically significant difference observed in relation to the year of study in the university and the use of SNS.

Conclusion

The results of the study confirm the extensive use of the Internet by the tertiary students. 82 % use the Internet more than 1 hour a day. The study also maintains the enjoyment students get from using the SNS and using it for meeting their social needs. Indeed, 72 % use the Internet as their free time activity and enjoying themselves. Only 4 % use the Internet for shopping and 24 % use the Internet for conducting



research. For the majority of students, conducting research means using the Internet to reach the information. 62 % of the participants use the SNS more, yet 19 % use the search engines more. This fact points out the widespread use of the Internet for social purposes. The findings of the study also confirm that the Facebook is the most widely used Social Network Site (Facebook 43 %, Youtube 39 %, Twitter 15 %, and MySpace 3%).

Among the Likert Scale type questions "I use SNS because it is fun" is the only questionnaire item with which students "Strongly Agree" with. The attitudes of the students support the use of the SNS for social purposes. In relation to education they are "Undecided" about commenting on educational topics, subscribing to education related sites, and reaching information related to education. Among the SNS, particularly Youtube is full of resources for the tertiary students. Findings suggest that this facility is not widely used by the university students.

In conclusion, the findings of the study suggest that the tertiary students care both for the content aspect, that is gaining information from the Internet and process aspect, action on the creation of the content pointed out by Kayhara and Wellman (2007). University students favor SNS mostly for gratifying their social rather than educational needs.

Fast developments in technology particularly converging media and reaching the Internet through mobile devices certainly increase the use of the SNS. Functions like checking out the location and sharing is one of them, face to face video communication is another. As the world shrinks into a global village through the extensive use of communication technologies, tertiary students need to be aware of the educational facilities the SNS provide. This would not only facilitate learning but also will help it to be fun.

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