

## UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR ON THE USE OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

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**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this research is to review current published research studies focusing on the use of Facebook by students. The focus of this research review is only limited to the empirical studies of the use of Facebook because it is the most popular Online Social Networking (OSN) among students. The qualitative approach was employed for this research. The results indicated that there were only few past studies found to be related to OSN studies among students in Malaysia. However, there was lack of published empirical-based studies specifically on school students' OSN use in Malaysia found from the past studies. The results also revealed that the current published studies on OSN in Malaysia are only focused mainly on college or university students.

**Keywords:** online social networking, behavior, use, students

### INTRODUCTION

At the present time, few different types of electronic devices such as personal computers, tablets as well as the mobile smart phones facilitate and make easy millions of these modern Malaysian students' use online social networking (OSN). Such global increase in internet diffusion rates fundamentally changed our ways of communication (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). One type of the internet online applications that has grown rapidly in prevalence and popularity in recent years is OSNs on the internet (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). OSN are the latest online communication tool that allows users to create public or semi-public profile, create and view their own as well as other users' OSNs and interact with people in their networks. OSNs such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace and You Tube are member-based internet communities that allow users to share their profile information, pictures and videos to communicate with other online members in innovative ways.

Millions of contemporary Malaysian school students use OSNs every day, however, little is known about how much, why and how they use OSN and the implications of the use of OSN to them. While youngster and teenagers relish the opportunities lived through the OSN, there are also possible problems related to OSN that may already exacerbate serious problems among the youngsters and teenagers in Malaysia. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to review current published research studies focusing on the use of OSN by students. The literature is hoped to facilitate in building foundation on future empirical studies of OSN in Malaysia by giving insight on the research gap and appropriate dependent and independent variables of the research. However, this review would only mainly focus on the use of Facebook due to its popularity among all the other OSN by Malaysian students. Of the various sites available, Facebook is undoubtedly one of the most popular and successful ones.

## **BACKGROUND OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING**

### **Online Social Networking**

Internet is a powerful tool that changes the way people communicate with each other. One of the most revolutionary effects of the internet is as a mean of communication. One type of the online applications that has grown rapidly in prevalence and popularity in recent years is OSN on the internet. OSN's websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace and Friendster are member-based internet communities that allow users to share their profile information, pictures and to communicate with other in innovative ways such as sending their online status updates as well as conducting a public or private online chat. Today, the nature of gathering has switched from one that was face-to face to one that is virtual through the use of computers connected to the Internet.

Social network sites has been defined as web-based services that allow users to construct a public or private profile within a system, a list of users' friends and a view of their list of connections and those made by others within that system. The emerging technologies, especially those referred to as Web 2.0 technologies change the way people access, interact with, create, and share data and information. Popular social network sites in Malaysia are Facebook, YouTube, Friendster and MySpace meanwhile Twitter was the 8th most popular social network in Malaysia (GreyReview, 2009).

### **Facebook**

Facebook was founded in February 2004 in Harvard University and only acting as the University OSN site before opened the site to general public in 2006 (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Facebook functions by allowing users to select one or more "networks" to which they will belong, such as a specific high school or university, a geographical area or city, or a company.

Facebook can also serve as a source of leisure due to the availability of games and applications (Kolek & Saunders, 2008). There are a number of ways for users to communicate with one another on Facebook. Users can send private messages to other individuals. This capability is similar to emailing (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Messages may also only be sent to one recipient at a time (Golder, Wilkinson, Huberman, 2007). Facebook's member also can make use of the Wall function. A Wall is a space on the profile, somewhat like 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). Facebook users can comment on their friends' messages, photographs and videos. Instant messaging is a text-based communication tool that allows dyadic synchronous interaction between two individuals, although there some systems that support multiparty chat (Nardi, Whittaker, & Bradner, 2000).

## **METHOD**

The qualitative approach was employed for this research. The articles were search from the electronic databases using the keyword "online social networking" and "Facebook," and open-ended search on the papers cited in some of the articles were carried out. The electronic databases used for the literature are Ebsco Host, Emerald and some articles are from the search in Google Scholar. The articles were collected and saved in the hard disc since August 2012. Reading and study of the articles took place since October 2012.

## FINDINGS

The review of the published research is grouped into three main groups: (a) students' Facebook usage profile, (b) students' attitudes toward Facebook, and (c) the effects of using Facebook.

### Students' Facebook usage profile

The internet enabled various novel applications and forms of communication with the massive membership pool of social networking sites (SNSs) confirming that millions of individuals around the globe are open to such innovations (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009), particularly teenagers and young adults, or the so called "Generation M". In student's Facebook usage profile, there are five main topics to be covered. These five topics are (i) Time spent on Facebook, (ii) Number of friends on Facebook, (iii) Information disclosed on Facebook, (iv) Activities on Facebook, and (v) Reason of using Facebook.

#### *(i) Time spent of Facebook*

Previous research found that students mainly spend between 10 and 60 min on Facebook per day (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009). Most of the students (79% of 97 students) reported that they spent between 10 and 60 min on Facebook daily (Ross et al., 2009). About 96% of 364 students logged onto Facebook from less than 10 min to 60 min every day (Stern & Taylor, 2007). Participants reported spending an average of 38.93 min on Facebook each day, with female students appearing to spend significantly more time on the network site than male students (Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2009). Golder, Wilkinson and Huberman (2007) found that Facebook use was lowest during college student weekend (mid-Friday to mid-Sunday), presumably when students were away from their computers. This proposed that Facebook use does not represent a leisure time activity but rather an activity that parallels schoolwork and other computer-related activities during the weekdays (Golder, Wilkinson & Huberman, 2007). Younger users were more likely than older ones to use Facebook (Kolek & Saunders, 2008). For instance, 65% of first year and sophomores students have a Facebook account versus 38.46% of juniors and seniors (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009).

#### *(ii) Number of friends on Facebook*

Past studies reported that students had between 150 and 350 friends on Facebook (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2009; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Golder, Wilkinson & Huberman, 2007; Lewis & West, 2009; Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2009; Sheldon, 2008). Majority had between 200 and 350 friends (Sheldon, 2008a). Students reported having a mean of 297.07 Facebook friends (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2009). Most respondents reported having 100 to 200 Facebook friends (Lewis & West, 2009). Facebook friends were generally peers of a similar age (West, Lewis & Currie, 2009). Adolescents and young adults tend to be the most frequent users of SNSs. Since their introduction, these SNSs have attracted a huge following among teenagers and also university students. Younger users were more likely than older ones to use OSN (Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

#### *(iii) Information disclosed on Facebook*

Students were very likely to post personal information such as birthday (96%), e-mail address (85%), hometown (85%), and relationship status (81%) (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2009). About 99% of 77 undergraduates reported using their actual name in their profile (first and last name) (Young & Quan-Haase, 2009). Almost two-thirds of respondents

indicated their sexual orientation (e.g., if they were interested in men, women, or both), relationship status, and interests (e.g., favorite books, movies and activities), 97.4% posted their school name, 83.1% their e-mail address, 92.2% their birth date, 80.5% their the current city or town in which they live, and almost all respondents reported posting an image of themselves (98.7%) and photos of their friends (96.1%). Similarly, about 90% of 4540 profiles contained a picture, 87.8% revealed their birth date. Seventy-four percent of 364 students reported that their profiles were accurate representations of themselves (Stern & Taylor, 2007).

#### *(iv) Student's activities on Facebook*

Limited research is available about how adolescents and young adults interact on social networking sites. Online sites are often considered innovative and different from traditional media such as television, film, and radio because they allow direct interaction with others (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). There are four categories of OSN educational activities namely content generating, interacting, sharing, and collaboratively socializing. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield (2008) asserted that students spend most of their time on reading or responding to notes or messages, reading comments (posts) on their page or wall, browsing friends' page (profile or walls), writing comments on friends' page, posting other people's wall or tagging photos.

#### *(v) Reasons of using Facebook*

Facebook can be used for different purpose with different interest and reason. It is suggested that Facebook is being used for learning about others, maintaining social communication, following updates about friends, school or class. Other research on reasons for students used Facebook also found that Facebook is primarily utilized for social interaction, especially to maintain existing relationship. Facebook also used as a channel to meet new people. Studies by Joinson (2011) and Sheldon (2008) found that students use Facebook to pass time (e.g., to occupy my time, to pass time when bored, to distract myself, play games or use applications within Facebook). Students express or present themselves by updating their status profile (Joinson, 2011).

### **Students' attitudes towards Online Social Networking**

Apparently communicating on Facebook was seen by students as fun and not serious (Lewis & West, 2009). Students perceived OSN was used most importantly for social reasons, although it is sometimes used informally for learning purposed (Madge et. al, 2009). Women have been shown to be characterized by greater privacy concerns than men and are also more likely to use e-mail and other textured types of communication. Students also perceived OSN as place for place to experience the feeling of affiliation and belonging, goal achievement, self-identity, values, and notion accepted behavior.

### **Effects of using Facebook**

Firstly, OSN opens opportunity for students to display their identities. Students use social networking websites effectively to observe content, disseminate information, engage in social interaction, and to express their identity (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). OSN is seen making its way into the educational environments when OSN applications have even more potential to further the improve learning and sharing of information among learners and teacher. It is hard to ignore Facebook potential within the education when we consider that many middle school and most high school students are online participating in discussions and groups. However, Afendi, Mohamed and Haslinda (2009) found that the result of a survey on Malaysian university students' perception shows that respondents mainly use OSNs for

informal learning, that is communicating with peers and arranging meeting. Ling *et al.* (2011) found that among impacts on the internet addiction among the internet users are insomnia, physical changes, inferiority, loss of concentration and loss of productivity. In addition, other OSN drawbacks are addiction, cyber bullying, identity theft, and cybercrime.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of the research is to review published empirical studies focusing on the use of Facebook by students. The results suggest that previous empirical research has focused on one or more of the following topics: (a) students' usage profile or extent of OSN uses (b) students' attitudes towards OSN or how students perceived their usage on OSN (c) various possible implications of OSN use to the students (including positive or negative impact of OSN towards the students). Based on the results, there is very few published empirical literature review on the use of OSN among students in Malaysia. Most of the previous studies on OSN in Malaysia on OSN were conducted only among the college or university students in Malaysia. Meanwhile OSN research using the school students (i.e. primary and secondary school) as a target sample is yet to be found.

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