

Full Length Research

POSITIVE INFLUENCES OF FACEBOOK ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

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There exists the established belief that Facebook hinders academic performances of students. The purpose of this study was to find out whether the academic performance of higher education is supported by the use of Facebook. This study differs from such in the history because the respondents were in the presence of the researcher when they fill their questionnaires and unlike early researches which were based only on the time spent on Facebook, this study discussed what students do online as well. Data was collected qualitatively which is sound, preferable and effective with the sample randomly selected of 105 students from three National Universities, three Advanced Technological Institutes and one Advanced Technological Institute section. After analyzing data, it was found that the academic performance of students in Higher Education was affected in a positive way due to Facebook use. Respondents who spent much time on Facebook in real world use it in the same capacity for academic work and class room preparation. Facebook showed respect for diverse talents. The students who use Facebook as a media in real life use it in a similar capacity for Educational purposes as well.

Key Words: Academic Performance, Higher Education, Facebook, Time, Preparation, Grade Point Average

INTRODUCTION

Among social networking sites, Facebook has been the most popular social networking site to date. Similar to other virtual communities, Facebook allow users to interact with people whom they already know offline or to meet new people. In addition, Facebook provides social and emotional support, information resources and bounds with other people and others who work, study, and live around. Facebook users can present themselves in their own online profiles, share resources with their

friends who can post comments on each other's pages and view each other's profiles. Facebook users can also join virtual groups and organizations based on similar interests, meet people with similar interests, receive updated news and share information. Facebook provides a variety of add-in functions, including online games, virtual farms, virtual pets, the wall and virtual gifts. Additionally, Facebook also provides a special feature of news feed, that users can browse their friends'

movements on Facebook. Mark Suckerberg created face book in 2004 and soon became the social networking giant reached 1 billion monthly active users by September 2012. Regarding various regions around the world, Facebook has 179 million monthly active users in the US and Canada, 229 million in Europe, and 212 million in Asia. In 2009, Facebook has surpassed its competitor MySpace, which was used to be the most popular Social Networking Site. Facebook is the giant social network among all others. (Annexure 1)

Social networking sites now are such a massive part of all our lives, whether we embrace or reject the notion, that it can no longer be ignored. It has never been easier to make friends than it is right now, mainly thanks to social networking sites. Just a few decades ago it was pretty tough to connect with people, unless you were the overly outgoing type able to make conversation with anyone at a party. The rise of social networks sprang up and the whole idea of friendship changed once more and forever. At present it is entirely possible to have hundreds of friends on Facebook. They may not be friends you know on a personal level and spend time with in the real world on a weekly basis. But they're friends nevertheless. There are several people who are considered as friends who have never met. Indeed, they may never meet but that doesn't lessen the connection. Thanks to social networks. Social media sites allow anyone to accomplish online many of the tasks that are important to them offline: staying connected with friends and family, making new friends, sharing pictures, and exchanging ideas Anderson (2012). Social media participation also can offer adolescents deeper benefits that extend into their view of self, community, and the world, including

1. opportunities for community engagement through raising money for charity and volunteering for local events, including political and philanthropic events;
2. enhancement of individual and collective creativity through development and sharing of artistic and musical endeavors;
3. growth of ideas from the creation of blogs, podcasts, videos, and gaming sites;
4. expansion of one's online connections through shared interests to include others from more diverse backgrounds (such communication is an important step for all adolescents and affords the opportunity for respect, tolerance, and increased discourse about personal and global issues); and
5. Fostering of one's individual identity and unique social skills

When it turns to academic life, students are motivated at an alarming rate for studies due to Facebook use Charles (2010). Student motivation naturally has to do with

students' desire to participate in the learning process Brophy (1987). There are two different types of student motivation, namely the intrinsic and extrinsic student motivation. Intrinsic motivated student participates in an activity 'for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes whereas extrinsic motivated student performs "in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself," such as grades, stickers, or teacher approval. Thus, even though they are equally motivated to participate in an activity, the origin or focus of their motivation are different. However, pointed out that there were slight difference between 'student motivation' and 'motivation to learn' which meant the meaningfulness, value, and benefits of academic tasks to the learner--regardless of whether or not they are intrinsically interesting. Besides, further explained 'motivation to learn' was featured by long-term, quality involvement in learning and commitment to the process of learning. Student motivation in learning is important to student learning success. There is a positive correlation between student motivation and academic achievement. There are a number of activities that can improve student motivation Junco (2010). This includes the environments for close interactions between teacher and student; close on-campus friendships and motivation in school-sponsored activities; class discussion and involvement with teacher in academic community; extracurricular involvement; academic work & experience; and interaction with peers argued that in the course of academic achievement, student motivation is needed in order to reach academic achievement. Though, student motivation is found critical to student success, the majority of studies are taken place in blended classroom or online environment rather than social networking platform like Facebook. Many researchers have Hew (2011), Arndt (2012) identified important variables dealing with Facebook. Four benefits are examined. (1) Interaction, (2) Communication, (3) Social relationship, (4) Participation. Unlike tradition classroom interaction, online social networking site, such as Facebook, are not bounded by time and space constraints but these platforms do no provide traditional face-to-face communication Pasek (2009). Thus, teachers become the facilitators and intermediaries between students and resources. Bower. The teacher is like a learning catalyst and knowledge navigator for students. Teachers should be active and interactive sufficiently to show their participation and involvement online. Teachers roles changes when participating in online learning environments such as Facebook and Twitter Manimannan (2012).

In the context of student learning, Astin defined engagement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the students devote to the academic experience". Today, engagement means the

time and effort students spend on educational-wise activities that are relatively linked to college academic work. Chickering (1987) offer 7 principles for improving undergraduate education based on research on good teaching and learning in colleges and universities. All of these principles are related to student engagement.

Good exercises in Higher Education

- Student - student, student - teacher and student – administration relationship develop
- Students become cooperative and do the same
- All actively engage in lessons
- Feedback is quick
- Emphasizes completing activities in the given time.
- Meet expectations
- Respects talents and learning methods of others

Academic Facebook studies as determine that Facebook use in college is significantly related to student motivation to learn, affective learning and classroom climate, and faculty and student relationships. Instructors can use Facebook to connect and bridge avenue to better communicate with their students Wang (2012). Facebook can serve as a means to communicate with students to extend the traditional physical classroom to a virtual classroom communication. Through Facebook, information can be exchanged. Godwin-Jones 2008 claims that Facebook is the tool and platform “that enhance communication and human interaction can potentially be harnessed for language learning”. From the language learning perspective, study on the use of Facebook as a valuable tool for authentic language interaction and as a platform for increasing students’ motivation and enhancing their English learning.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to evaluate the positive influences of Facebook on Higher Education in Sri Lanka and propose further recommendations to use Facebook in enhancing Higher Education. The generally accepted belief about Facebook use is a not a positive one both in the local and international scenario. There is some truth in it as Facebook related crimes are at a rapid increase in the present context. Especially among students in the secondary education, the use of Facebook has created lot of unnecessary problems which hinder their education. The researcher wanted to find out whether the same thing happens in the Higher Education as well.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample of students was selected from three National

universities, three Advanced Technological Institutes and one ATI section. Of these, three institutions are in the capital city of Colombo while others are far away from Colombo undergraduate programs and Higher National Diploma programs of various disciplines. All were full time students and the majority was boys. Their age group ranged from 20 – 24 yrs.

The two page questionnaire constructed on 5 point Likert scale was pre-tested on 10 Diploma Holders to ensure that it was clearly understood. It was further reviewed by three Senior Lecturers from three different disciplines. Based on the suggestions provided by them it was modified and finalized. It comprised both closed and open ended questions. The final question which is open ended collected respondents’ suggestions to use face book in enhancing academic performance.

Prior permission was obtained from the respective Heads of Departments to conduct the survey and from each center an equal number of respondents were selected. Convenient and purposeful qualitative sample method was used to gather data. This study differs from others of the same kind as the researcher herself was present in front of the respondents and not like in most early studies where the form of questionnaire was distributed by somebody who is totally unaware of the contents of the questionnaire, they got some matters clarified.

The sample consisted of 105 students from three National Universities and four Advanced Technological Institutions in Sri Lanka namely University of Moratuwa, Sri Jayawardanapura, Sabaragama and Advanced Technological Institution, Dehiwala, Galle, Kandy, and Rathnapura. Equal numbers of questionnaires were given to each institution. The distance from Colombo to some Universities and Advanced Technological Institutes out station hindered the selection of many such if done could have been much better for the study. The researcher herself had to travel a lot across the country to collect data as technology based data collection was not possible, lacks confidentiality and takes time. As the study was performed at Government owned higher educational, institutes some of the planned activities were not done due to allocation of lab facilities and the researcher herself didn’t have enough to provide. Dearth of local studies on the same was a big barricade in finding relevant Literature. Last but not least financial matters stood high above all in fulfilling the requirement of the survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The activities ranged from sending messages, Facebook chats, to viewing and posting videos in real life and sharing notes, start projects to group assignments in

academic life. Scale values were “never”- %, “rarely”- 25%, “sometimes” 50%, “somewhat frequently”- 75%, and “very frequently”- 100%. Through gathered data, it is obvious that respondents who use Facebook for real life activities make use of the same in academic life as well in a similar capacity. It is significant that no response was found under “never”. More than half of respondents use Facebook in both academic and real life activities. Exchange of study notes and starting projects will reach its peak next year as many institutions are now on pilot projects. By the time the research was carried out, both exceeds 60%. Assignments have not yet found its place on line except few institutions and students were being trained via Moodle for more easy access online in many of the institutions under study. (Annexure 2)

Through the study it was clear that they became familiar with Facebook via real life encounters and later made use of it for their academic life as well. So, there is a significant relationship between frequency of Facebook use and engagement of academic activities.

The discussions on Facebook with group members were really helpful. Used as a learning artifact, Facebook provides an - easy - use technology for students. They obtained motivation and encouragement from peers by expressing their own emotions. Students use Facebook actively sharing and exchanging knowledge and information and also learning never stopped in face book accessed classes. Teachers responded positively on Facebook in students' projects, course assignments and course materials and promoted learning. Showed respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. Shy students who do not ask questions face- to-face in the class were given chances to ask questions online. The responses received by students were of big help for them to engage in their learning activities according to their individual needs and capacity. Class discussions were extended outside of the classroom due to Facebook use.

CONCLUSION

The study made several contributions; first, the use of Facebook contributes to the level of learning engaged in the real world. Facebook helps students merge their social and academic lives. The students in this study expressed their satisfaction with instructors and institution which is essential to help them gain benefits and engage in more beneficial uses of technology.

Therefore, it is important to understand that integrating the use of Facebook or some other technological devices can really improve students' knowledge and skills. Secondly, Facebook as a new learning artifact can lead e-learning environment. Use of Facebook opens new

world of possibilities where students can engage in to better academic performances. It indeed can empower learning activities anywhere at any time. Facebook is not a time waster. Both instructors and students can create

academic communities via Face book through that both parties will be benefited. This will be able to collaborate on academic projects such as laboratory works. Giving and submission of assignments can be promoted via face book. (At present this prevails in some higher educational centers, especially in IT related sections.) It is therefore, clear that current thinking about the implementation of new learning social network sites in classroom will be a big step. Third, the authorities concern should know how to match the affordances of technology with curricular to enable rich learning opportunities. Facebook can be served as a means to communicate with students to extend the traditional classroom to a virtual classroom communication and language learning also can be achieved through Facebook.

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Annexure 01

Popularity of selected Social Network Sites worldwide from 2004-2011 in millions

Name	Active Accounts	Launch year
Face book	901+million	2004
Twitter	900+million	2008
Skype	663+million	2003
Qzone	536+million	1999
Windows Line	500+million	2005
LinkdIn	100+million	2003
Google+	62+million	2011

Annexure 02

Frequency of Facebook activities among students in Higher Education

