

## ***Trends and Patterns in Social Media Usage Among Pre-Service Teachers***

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### **Abstract**

Social media allow users to connect each other and share multimedia information instantaneously that transcend across geographical lines, cultural boundaries and differential time zones. Recent Pew study suggests that 73 percent of teens in the US use social media and the number is growing. Among social media sites, Facebook, in particular has been expanding its network and reported that the number of monthly active users in the first quarters of 2015 topped 1.44 billions. Facebook has been clearly recognized as a dominant social media site.

A study was conducted at one of the teacher training institutions in the Gulf region to find out the trends and patterns in social media usage among pre-service teachers. A survey questionnaire was used to collect information regarding the use of Facebook as a social media. This paper reports preliminary findings from the study that focuses on pre-service teachers' perception about Facebook and how the media has been used in their daily activities. The paper suggests some innovative ways that educators can harness the social media and use as an instructional technology tool. Implications from the study are also discussed in the paper.

*Keywords:* Social media, Facebook, teacher education, collaboration, instructional technology

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## **Introduction**

Facebook has been emerged as one of the convenient ways to establish contact with friends, to make new friends and develop relationship. Many studies have been conducted in the past to investigate the roles and affordances of social media, positive and negative impact on human interactions, bonding and bridging among communities from the social communication perspectives. There were also some attempts to use social media as an educational tool in schools, colleges and higher learning institutions. Some studies examined the use of social media as collaborative tool to enhance teaching and learning and its impact on education (Khine, in press).

## **Review of the literature**

A meta-analysis of Facebook research conducted by Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) aimed to answer a direct question: Why do people use Facebook? They examined 42 evidence-based studies on Facebook and search for the psychological factors contributing to Facebook use. Their investigation focused on finding notable trends in general Facebook use, the demographics of its users, and the personality characteristics associated with its users. The respondent of these studies were undergraduate and graduate students. They noted that "Facebook use was motivated by two primary psychological needs: the "need to belong" and the "need for self-presentation." They posited that the need to belong was intrinsically driven and focused on gaining affection and social acceptance from others, while the need for self-presentation consisted of online behaviours involved in the continuous process of impression management".

In another meta-analysis, Song et al (2014) explores the relationship between Facebook use and loneliness. The study involved examination of 18 research that covers 8798 samples to measure Facebook use and loneliness. The study asks whether using Facebook increase or decrease loneliness and what causes what, i.e. does Facebook make its users lonely (or less lonely), or do lonely people (or less lonely people) use Facebook?. The researchers found that there was a significant overall average effect in the positive relationship between Facebook use and loneliness. Social support and shyness contribute to the loneliness and that causes the Facebook use.

In Cheung's et al (2011) study, the researchers attempts to explain why students use Facebook. They employed social influence theory, the use and gratifications paradigm, and social presence theory to explain the phenomenon. The results show that social presence has the strongest impact on Facebook use. They also found that social factors are more important in determining intentional social action.

Sagioglou et al (2014) presented three studies to explore the hypothesis that Facebook activity negatively affects people's emotional state. A first study shows that the longer people are active on Facebook, the more negative is their mood. The second study indicates causal evidence for this effect by showing that Facebook

activity leads to a deterioration of mood. They found that the effect is mediated by a feeling of not having done anything meaningful. Although there are negative outcomes for the users, so many people continue to use Facebook regularly. This prompted to ask a question, why people still use it. The answer lies in the third study that “suggests that this may be because people commit an affective forecasting error in that they expect to feel better after using Facebook, whereas, in fact, they feel worse (p.361)”. From these studies much has been revealed the phenomenon, effects and consequence of Facebook use in public and among students.

## **Methods**

### *Subjects*

The sample of his study involved pre-service teacher training students in one of the teacher training college in the Gulf. The sample consists of 438 students, predominantly female. Out of the total students, 356 were female (81.3%) and 82 were male (18.7%). Among the sample, majority of the students were within the age range of 17-18 (44.1%) and 37.4% falls into the age range of 19-20. 15.5% of the participants are in the age range of 21-22 years.

Participants were briefed by their respective class teachers and consents were obtained to participate in the study. They were also told that there is no right or wrong answers in the survey and participation in the study it will not affect their studies and grades. It was clearly indicated to the students that all what the researchers wanted was their opinion.

### *Instrument*

A 24 -items bilingual survey was developed for this study. The survey comprises of 4 descriptive items on patterns of use that determine the number of years participants used (FB1), whether they used Facebook before joining the college (FB2), frequency of Facebook use (FB3) and duration of Facebook use (FB4). The remaining 23 items are the participants' perception about Facebook. The participants choose their answers from five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). If they are not sure about the answer they can also choose neither agree nor disagree (N). Examples of items are “I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook” and “I use Facebook to find new friends”. It took approximately 20 minutes to answer all the questions in the survey.

## **Analysis and Results**

### *Reliability*

Analyses were conducted to determine the reliability and consistency of each items. The overall Cronbach alpha value of 24-items (FB5 to FB28) was found to be 0.953. The reliability analysis for each item ranged from 0.949 to 0.955. All the Cronbach alpha values exceeded the recommended value of .70 (Nunnally, 1978), indicating adequate internal consistency.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

The first question addresses how long the students had their Facebook account. 44.7% of the students revealed that they had account for more than three years. Most of them had accounts from 1-3 years and only 13% indicated that they had account less than a year ago.

The second question asked for whether the students participated in the Facebook groups before joining the college. It was found that half of the students were already in Facebook groups and remaining half joined the groups after they join the college.

When asked about the frequency of logging on to the Facebook, 26.5% indicated that they log on to the Facebook several times a day and 29% of them answered that they log on once a month. This data shows that one third of the students in this sample are not really active users.

The students were also asked how long they stay on Facebook once they log on to the platform. 56.4% indicated that they stayed on for approximately 30 minutes. 24.2% indicated that they stay on for an hour and 12.6% stayed on for one to three hours. It seems that majority of the students stayed on for a half an hour.

Some descriptive statistics of the survey items are shown in Table 1. The mean score ranged from 1.58 to 3.30 and all the items of the Facebook scale had a mean score above the midpoint of 3.00. This indicates that the participants exhibited a strong response for the Facebook questionnaire. All the standard deviations (SD) were above 1.00, indicating a large spread of item scores around the mean.

The highest mean score is linked to the item "Facebook is a good way to network with others" and the lowest mean score is related to the item "I use Facebook to buy and sell stuff". Majority of the respondents (61.2%) perceived that Facebook is not part of their daily activity. Approximately of half of them indicated that they are proud to tell people that they are on Facebook, but the remaining half did not agree. Only 20% of the students feel that they are part of the Facebook community, but half of them think they are not. Again only 22% think that they will be sad if the Facebook shut down, and 61% of them think that it will be affect them.

In terms of usage, majority of them (62.3%) revealed that they use Facebook to look at friend's photo album always, often and some occasions. When asked whether they Facebook help them feel closer to their friends, the answers were mixed. 40% of them agree or strongly agree that it makes them closer, but another 40% disagree or strongly disagree the fact while remaining 20% are not sure. Majority of the students (55.7%) indicated that Facebook allows them to find new friends. In terms of mode of communication, 70.6% and 76.5% of students did not use Facebook alternative to email and phone calls. It was also found that overwhelmingly (83.5%) of the students did not use privacy settings to select what part of their profile share with other users.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the items in the survey

Number	Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
FB5	Facebook is part of my everyday activity	2.39	1.370	0.575	-1.004
FB6	I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook	2.62	1.252	0.261	-0.987
FB7	I dedicate a part of my daily schedule to Facebook	2.00	1.135	1.005	0.157
FB8	I feel I am out of touch when I haven't log on to Facebook for a while	2.21	1.370	0.800	-0.686
FB9	I feel I am part of the Facebook community	2.61	1.375	0.235	-1.234
FB10	I would be sad if Facebook shut down	2.26	1.413	0.710	-0.877
FB11	I get ideas about what everyone else is watching, reading or listening to from Facebook	2.97	1.366	-0.140	-1.252
FB12	Facebook is a good way for me to network with others	3.30	1.306	-0.474	-0.912
FB13	Facebook helps me feel closer to my friends	2.97	1.372	-0.056	-1.234
FB14	Facebook allows me to find new friends	3.33	1.376	-0.526	-0.961
FB15	I use Facebook to keep in touch with family members	2.14	1.317	0.839	-0.561
FB16	I use Facebook to keep in touch with friends	2.75	1.375	0.152	-1.254
FB17	I use Facebook to look at the profile of someone I think attractive	2.65	1.442	0.249	-1.312
FB18	I use Facebook to post photos in my album	2.21	1.279	0.658	-0.780
FB19	I use Facebook to look at friends' photo album	2.96	1.352	-0.053	-1.188
FB20	I use Facebook to leave wall comment	2.76	1.384	0.141	-1.269
FB21	I use Facebook when I don't want to study	2.55	1.395	0.413	-1.089
FB22	I use Facebook to keep in contact with old friends	2.82	1.407	0.040	-1.318
FB23	I use Facebook instead of phone	1.76	1.147	1.393	0.915
FB24	I use Facebook instead of email	2.01	1.287	1.048	-0.121
FB25	I use Facebook to pass the time	2.71	1.304	0.137	-1.103
FB26	I use Facebook to find new friends	2.49	1.393	0.425	-1.159

FB27	I use Facebook to buy and sell stuff	1.58	1.083	1.903	2.614
FB28	I use privacy settings to select what part of my profile share with others	2.98	1.599	0.093	-1.557

N = 438

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to determine the trends and patterns of Facebook usage among pre-service trainee teachers in a teacher training college in a Gulf country. This paper presents preliminary findings from the study. The usage of social media among teens are rapidly changing. Recent Pew Research (2015) revealed that internet use is a near 'constant' for some teens and mobile devices are ubiquitous among them. The data collected in the US shows that 80% of the teens use internet almost constantly or several times a day.

There are many social networking software that are introduced in recent years, some for international users and some for local audience. Connecting to social media is not limited to Facebook only, and teens use mobile apps such as Snapchat and Whatsapp to contact each other. In addition other social media sites such as Instagram, Tumblr, Vine, Twitter and online pinboards (like Pinterest and Polyvore) are also popular to share multimedia messages. In some of the Gulf states, d1g (diwanji) platform attracts millions of users in the region and it allows to share videos, photos, audio, forum and Q&A facility, in addition to Facebook and Twitter which can use Arabic language. Strong and Hareb (2012) reported the social media use among Arabic women in the UAE. The study involved 167 female Emiratis and explore the usage of Twitter among them. The results showed that majority of them (94%) prefer Twitter to Facebook. Due to the nature of the rapidly changing phenomenon, it is prudent to consider that the results from this survey is valid at the time of data collection.

For the young generation today technology is integral part of their lives. The use of social media such as Facebook by students is expected to continue and increase annually as they embrace digital life style. More research and innovative approaches are needed to determine the effects of social media and explore the use of Facebook for education purpose leveraging the affordance of the medium.

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