Use of Social Media among University Students: Leisure or Learning

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Abstract

The use of social media, particularly Facebook has grown tremendously popular and is increasing fast with every coming day. Most of the users happen to be students of higher education institutions, so it is pertinent to explore the nature of its use by university students, the harms associated with it and the issue of Facebook for spreading religious posts. The sample for the study comprised of university students purposively selected from a large public sector university in Islamabad. The data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire properly validated and pilot tested. It was found that Facebook is mainly used for keeping contact with friends, sharing information, as a source of entertainment and leisure activity. However, its use as an online learning resource was found very rare among the university students. The students identified various harms of using Facebook including personal, social and moral effect. We found diverse reactions of students regarding Islamic posts on Facebook, the concerns associated with these posts and how the abuse of Islamic posts can be prevented.

Keywords: Social media, Facebook trend, online leisure, online learning.

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Introduction

It was in year 2004 when Facebook was launched as a social website free for all users. The main purpose behind the launching was to help people share information and to connect with others. Soon, Social Networking Websites (SNW) became very popular among its users (Selwyn, 2009; Sobaih, Moustafa, Ghandforoush, & Khan, 2016). Some of popular of these include Myspace , Friendster and Face book (Initiative, 2006). Majority of the users of these websites are students. Interestingly, Facebook users has crossed the figure of one billion at present (Sagioglou & Greitemeyer, 2014).

The SNW are used for various purposes. The individuals use these websites for interacting with one another and for sharing personal information (Hew & Cheung, 2012). However, some people also use it for sharing their experiences and for building relationships (Jiao, Gao, & Yang, 2015).

Facebook provides a good opportunity for interacting and communicating with friends. The search features and suggest friends also help in finding out past friends of schools and colleges and thus provides a way for sharing information, pictures, videos and discussions (Hajli & Lin, 2014; Liu, 2010).

However, there is a question that whether there is any education use of Facebook besides source of entertainment and a leisure tool. There are studies that advocated that Facebook can be used for educational purposes by both students as well teachers (Hew & Cheung, 2012). However, the use of Facebook can greatly help students in their learning (Munoz & Towner, 2009). Moreover, teachers can use Facebook for making connection with foreign universities and possible research collaboration. Such interaction also provides opportunity for mutual sharing of ideas, discussion and exchange of updated information (Sobaih et al., 2016).

Facebook can also be used by students and teachers collectively. The teachers can use it for information dissemination such as lecture scheduling, uploading of lecture notes, PowerPoint presentation, pasting links of related information and students' assignment (Sobaih & Moustafa, 2016).

Nevertheless, there are also some security concerns associated with the use of Facebook. One reason for this is that the students do not restrict their profile visibility as the majority users allow the default setting which is set to open access (Kolek & Saunders, 2008). Such

vulnerability of personal information may pose various kinds of threat to the Facebook users in the longer run.

A recent trend that has evolved at present is the use of Facebook in sharing and spreading religious information. There are hundreds of posts related to religion that are shared, commented and liked by thousands of Facebook users. Due to limitation of time and resources, this study would only focus on post related to Islam. It has been observed that the frequency of post related to Islam have increased on Facebook. This include sharing messages related to Islam, Quranic verses, hadiths of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), pictures of sacred places of Muslims, names of Allah, graves of pious people and Sufis etc. Thus, social media is accounting for spreading Islamic teachings worldwide called 'dawah' (Qayyum & Mahmood, 2015). Sharing and spreading Islamic messages and posts is not objectionable however, there are various issues and concerns link with these posts and messages. One problem is the issue of authenticity and verifiability of these posts. It is not difficult to post messages and comments on Facebook that will aim at degrading Islam by misrepresenting and misquoting information. The recent problem of objectionable remarks and posts on social media is one evidence of using social media for defaming Islam (Hashim, 2017). It happens that sometimes the users are forwarding posts related to Islam which are not authentic and thus corrupts the beliefs of our youth who can readily fell a prey to these kinds of ambiguous posts. Thus, it is imperative to explore the use of Facebook related to Islamic posts in universities and its educating role and influence on our students. This research will help in identifying the students' choices while using Facebook and the harms associated with it.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the purpose of using Facebook by university students
2. To identify the harms associated with the use of Facebook
3. To explore the students' reaction to Islamic posts on social media and preventing its abuse

Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature and a survey type design. The population of the study comprised of university students of undergraduate level. The sample for the study was taken from a large public sector university in the federal capital, Islamabad. The sample was purposively selected as comprising of students who were active user of

Facebook as we limited SNW to Facebook only. The criteria for 'active user' was students who would use Facebook on daily basis for at least one hour and having more than 200 friends on Facebook. The original sample consisted of 650 students, but only 395 students fulfill the criteria of active user. The data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire designed after proper literature review. The instrument was properly validated through three experts and then pilot tested with a small sample. The instrument was further refined and improved from the findings of pilot testing. The data from the students were collected in their classrooms to reach maximum number of students. The questionnaires not fulfilling the criteria were later removed from data analysis. The data from each questionnaire was first read and the responses were underlined. This helped in identifying different themes from the questionnaire. Themes that were linked were merged together to narrow down the number of themes. After identifying the main themes, the frequency for each theme was counted and then converted into percentages for interpreting results.

Results and Discussion

The data from the open-ended questionnaire was tabulated for greater understanding of the students' response. The students were guided to elaborate further their response if they feel so. The elaboration provided by students is also mentioned with relevant themes in the description.

Table 1
Purpose of using social media

Response	Frequency	%
Interacting with friends/relatives	294	74.4
Sharing information	253	64.1
Time pass	212	53.8
Entertainment	182	46.2
Online learning and education	141	35.9

The responses of students revealed that they use Facebook for several purposes. We found that the main purpose of using Facebook was to interact with friends and relatives (74.4%). This is also supported by Hew and Cheung (2012) that students use Facebook for keeping in touch with their friends and to find their lost friends. Tosun (2012) also found similar result and he called it 'long distance friendship'. Majority of students viewed that they use Facebook for sharing information (64.1%). The students specified that they share their pics, views, thought and to get updated news on Facebook. Thus, it is a source of keeping oneself updated as the news spread very easily across social media. It was also interesting to find that 53.8% students said that they use Facebook only as a time pass. 46.2% students expressed that they use social media for entertainment just like TV. Facebook provides all sorts of entertainment like news, information, music, pictures, movies etc. and thus one can easily find one's entertainment on Facebook. This is also backed by Tosun (2012) that entertainment is a basic motive for using Facebook account. Unfortunately, the smallest proportion of students expressed that they use Facebook for online learning and education purpose (35.9%). However, Hew and Cheung (2012) discovered no students using Facebook for education purpose in their sample with Singapore. Similar results was also reported by Mazer, Murphy, and Simond (2009). The students who reported of using Facebook for leaning specified that they use it for doing assignment, sharing classwork, coordinating with their class fellows on projects and getting feedback on their work. Sobaih and Moustafa (2016) also reported similar education use of Facebook. According to Liburd and Christensen (2013), social media has a great use in promoting learning through interaction and collaboration, but we did not find such active use in our sample students.

Table 2
Harms of Facebook perceived by students

Response	Frequency	%
Time wastage	223	56.4
Privacy violation	142	35.9
Bad for children	132	33.3
Health problem	71	17.9
Effect on social relations	51	12.8
Laziness/procrastination	41	10.3
Problem of authenticity	30	7.7

In order to explore whether students perceive any harms associated with using Facebook, we found that majority students expressed wastage of time as negative effect of using Facebook (56.4%). The students identified they have less time for studies as Facebook take too much of their time. These students also said that Facebook distracts them from work and even their sleep is affected due to spending time on Facebook. This was also reported by Sagioglou and Greitemeyer (2014). We observed that the frequency of students was less in identifying other harms of using social media. 35.9% students viewed that the privacy issue is a risk which involves sharing of pic over the web, tagging, blaming others publicly, using one's bio date for blackmailing etc. Similar findings is also supported by Au and Lam (2015). Some students expressed health issue with using Facebook such as vision impairment and weight increase (17.9%). However, this problem may be linked with using any electronic device. 12.8% students opined that use of Facebook also affect social relations such as less time for family members and mistrust in family relations. Perhaps, this should be the main harm of using social media but in our sample, it was not reported by a small percentage of students. 10.3% students viewed that Facebook creates laziness and procrastination. Pennington (2009) also supported procrastination and distraction as the main motive for using Facebook. In fact, Sagioglou and Greitemeyer (2014) found that the Facebook has little utility and the users have depressed mode after using it as they think they wasted their time. While, only 7.7% students viewed problem of authenticity of information as which may not be authentic and thus the users can be misguided by false information. This is also supported by Qayyum and Mahmood (2015) that information related to Islam has a complicated nature and thus cannot be relied upon when found on social media.

Table 3
Reactions of students on Islamic Post

Students' Response	Frequency	%
Like to see them	111	28.2
Don't like to see them on social media	71	17.9
Just read	61	15.4
neglect	61	15.4
Share if it is accurate	41	10.3

The responses of students were sought on increasing Islamic posts on Facebook. The low level of response rate by students showed the lack of interest on religion. 28.2% students expressed that they like to see

Islamic posts on Facebook. The students specified that they appreciate pictures of sacred places and religious posts. In contrast, 17.9% students completely objected on Islamic post being shared on Facebook. These students said that Facebook is an entertainment platform and thus it is not appropriate to post Islamic information as it is disgraceful. Facebook is for entertainment and not for education as found by Hew and Cheung (2002). Some students remarked that posting Islamic information amounts to emotional blackmailing and thus should be avoided. 15.4% students stated that they just read such information however, they do not share it with others. The same percentage of students expressed that they neglect Islamic posts on Facebook and even do not read them. Lastly, only 10.3% students expressed that they read and share Islamic posts if they appear accurate to them. However, how will they determine that the post is authentic? Indeed, it is very difficult for students to determine and thus many posts are shared that are fake and/or aimed at corrupting Muslim's beliefs. The findings of Hassan and Bashir (2012) states that Facebook is a source of spreading rumor and thus cannot be trusted. Bugeja (2006) also found similar results.

Table 4
Preventing abuse of Islamic posts

Students' Response	Frequency	%
Do not like the post	132	33.3
Block it/report it	81	20.4
Create awareness and educate the user	71	17.9
Tell the person not to post	30	7.7

In order to prevent the abuse of Islamic posts such as unverified traditions, wrong comments associated with prophets and religious scholars, distorted facts; the students were asked how these can be prevented. 33.3% students expressed that such post shall be ignored on the Facebook page. The users shall not like the post and neither they should share such posts to discourage the initiator. Another effective choice with the user is to block the posts and /or report to the Facebook authorities about such posts so that they could be removed from the website (20.4%). Moreover, 17.9% suggested to create awareness among the Facebook users about Islamic posts and to educate them about sharing and giving comments on such posts. Lastly, 7.7% students expressed that the users should request the person who posted the Islamic information not to post such material and share their comments about the post if any correction is needed.

Conclusion

Facebook is mostly used by students for interaction with friends, entertainment and as a leisure activity. Though that it has a great potential to be use in education and online learning (Sobiah and Mustafa, 2016), the present study found the education use of Facebook on the lowest priority. The use of Facebook was associated with time wastage, privacy concern, and deterioration of social relations and moral values. The researchers also explored students' response to Islamic posts on Facebook and it was found that students like to see Islamic posts while, some students do not like these posts on Facebook and would neglect them. Some would read and even share them with others. However, the authenticity of these posts is a serious concern which needs to be addressed by future researches. As regarding education, our teachers have failed in utilizing the power of these SNW for learning and education purposes (Al-rahmi, Othman, Yusof, & Musa, 2015). The study recommends that Facebook and other SNW shall be used for learning and education purpose besides entertainment and finding friends. This also requires obligations on teacher educators to incorporate online learning courses for teacher trainers to ensure good use of SNW for learning purposes.

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