Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Computers in Human Behavior

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/comphumbeh

Malaysian Facebookers: Motives and addictive behaviours unraveled

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Malaysians were reported to have the most number of Facebook friends, spend more time on Facebook and might be addicted to Facebook as well. This paper explored Facebook usage pattern, motivations and psychological/behavioural factors affecting the users. A focus group study was first conducted to explore motives to use Facebook and symptoms related to excessive Facebook usage. The themes emerging from this were then used in addition to Uses and Gratifications theory and Brown's Addiction framework to further explore Facebook usage pattern, motivations and behavioural issues among a large group of students. Results show that Malaysian students use Facebook actively, similar to other studies done worldwide. Factor analyses yielded five motives to use Facebook: Social Networking, Psychological Benefits, Entertainment, Self Presentation and Skill Enhancement. As for the behavioural symptoms, Salience, Loss of Control, Withdrawal and Relapse and Reinstatement emerged as the four main symptoms. These results show that in general Malaysian students use Facebook for similar motives as reported in literature. However, it is interesting to note that they also exhibited behavioural symptoms, such as Salience, Loss of Control, Withdrawal and Relapse and Reinstatement due to excessive Facebook usage.

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1. Introduction

Today Facebook has more than 800 million active users (Facebook, 2011) and its popularity can be attributed to the ease of understanding and using the site, and its ability to permit social contact with a wide variety of individuals at any given moment for free. Enthusiasm for Facebook is particularly apparent in Malaysia, as Malaysians are known to have the most number of friends on Facebook (The Star, 2010). As of January 2012, there were at least 12 million Facebook users in Malaysia, constituting about 46.95% of the overall population. Of these, youth aged between 18 and 34 years old constitute about 62% of Facebook users in the country (socialbakers.com).

Facebook is particularly popular among students, and research shows that 85–99% of students use this medium (Hargittai, 2008; Jones & Fox, 2009). Facebook supports various features that enhance communications, for example, it allows individuals to share personal information, photographs and videos, send messages to their friends, and join groups of friends/causes, among others. Therefore, it allows a varying amount of flexibility in communication styles. In addition, it is also deemed attractive as it provides a platform to the users to boost their self-esteem and popularity,

seek information about one another, and even to relieve loneliness (Ebeling-Witte, Frank, & Lester, 2007; Utz, 2010).

Researchers have also highlighted the negative consequences of using Facebook, especially in terms of privacy (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; Special & Li-Barber, 2012), and most recently addiction. As a matter of fact, the term Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD) was coined to refer to the negative consequences of excessive use of Facebook (Fenichel, 2009). Addictive behaviour is defined as an over-attachment to an object or activity (Orford, 2001), with indicators such as withdrawal, loss of control and salience (Brown, 1997). This pattern of addiction was noted among the younger users for excessive use of Internet (Cao & Su, 2007) and mobile phones (Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012; Walsh, White, & Young, 2010).

Work on Facebook has been extensively studied in many countries, focusing on the motivations to use (Lampe, Wash, Velasquez, & Ozkaya, 2010; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011), Facebook and education (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Roblyer & McDaniel, 2010), privacy issues (Kolek & Saunders, 2008; Pempek et al., 2009; Special & Li-Barber, 2012) and personality factors related to Facebook usage based on the Big Five factors (Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012; Ross et al., 2009; Teh, Yong, Chong, & Yew, 2011). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies were conducted in Malaysia to examine Facebook usage and behavioural issues, despite its overwhelming popularity in this country. Therefore, the current study aims to extend the literature by examining the motivations to use Facebook and its usage pattern among Malaysian students, aged between

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17 and 30 years old. In addition, behavioural issues related to the use of Facebook are also investigated to see if the students exhibit any addictive symptoms to Facebook.

2. Facebook usage pattern

Spending time on Facebook appears to be part of most young adults' daily activities. The majority of the studies conducted worldwide suggest that students spend between 10 and 60 min on Facebook daily (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007 in the US; Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009 in Canada; Pempek et al., 2009 in the US; Ross et al., 2009 in Canada). Similarly young users were also found to be more active on Facebook, logging in several times daily. Studies conducted in the US revealed students checking their Facebook an average of 5.75 times daily (Junco, 2011) or logging on "a few times" daily (Pempek et al., 2009).

Past studies also indicated that students had between 150 and 350 friends on Facebook (Christofides et al., 2009; Ellison et al., 2007; Lewis & West, 2009). For example, Canadian students in Christofides et al. (2009) reported having a mean of 297.07 Facebook friends. Most of the United Kingdom (UK) respondents reported having 100–200 Facebook friends (Lewis & West, 2009), whereas the US respondents had 200–350 friends (Sheldon, 2008). Malaysians were recently reported to have the highest number of Facebook friends, averaging at 233 based on a survey on 50,000 social network sites' users in 46 countries (The Star, 2010).

3. Motivations to use Facebook

3.1. Uses and gratifications theory

Uses and gratifications (U&Gs) traditional media framework enables researchers to study how media, including social media, are utilised to fulfill the needs of individual users with different goals (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). This theory implies that people use technologies which gratify social and psychological needs. U&G focuses on three tenets, that is, media adopters are goal-directed, active and are aware of their needs. These have been applied by many to examine the consumers' motives for using the Internet (Chigona, Kamkwenda, & Manjoo, 2008; Grant, 2005) and mobile phones (Balakrishnan & Raj, 2012; Leung, 2007; Walsh et al., 2010).

In recent years, researchers have applied U&G to find the motivations for using social media (Lampe et al., 2010; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Smock et al., 2011). For instance, using U&G among the US student population, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) found nine factors that motivate one to use Facebook: habitual pastime, relaxing entertainment, expressive information sharing, escapism, cool and new trend, companionship, professional advancement, social interaction and meeting new people. Similarly, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found most of their respondents used MySpace and Facebook to keep in touch with their friends, to post/look at pictures, to make new friends and also to locate old friends. Foregger (2008) also identified nine motives behind Facebook usage: passing-time, social information, utilities and upkeep, channel use, marketplace, maintain, and establish old ties, social comparison, attractiveness, and interconnectedness.

Many other studies examining the motivations of using Facebook have cited relationship maintenance or social interaction as one of the core reasons. These include socialising with friends, making new friends and maintaining relationships with those who are separated by physical distance, among others (Ellison et al., 2007; Lewis & West, 2009; Pempek et al., 2009). Facebook also helps users to create and enhance their self-image (Utz, 2010) overcome shyness and relieve feelings of loneliness (Ebeling-Witte et al., 2007).

Facebook can positively impact a student's life, helping students form and maintain social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). For example, it provides personal information about other people via the profile pages making it possible for students to identify others who might be useful in some capacity (e.g., identifying an expert in a particular area). Roblyer et al. (2010) found their students to be more interested than faculty in using Facebook for educational purposes.

In general, literature reviews indicate the motivations to use Facebook are: to maintain existing relationships, to meet new people, it is cool and fun (Lewis & West, 2009; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Pempek et al., 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008), to be popular (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2008), to pass the time (Foregger, 2008; Pempek et al., 2009), to express oneself (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Pempek et al., 2009), to learn (Ellison et al., 2007; Roblyer et al. 2010), to manage tasks (Young & Quan-Haase, 2009) and for student activism, that is, joining certain groups of interest (Bosch, 2009; Foregger, 2008).

U&G studies can be either exploratory, that is, starting off with no assumptions or seeking to identify motivations for a media or the study can start with a list of possible gratifications and seeks to confirm these with the respondents (Ling & Pedersen, 2003). The current study adopts the latter style by identifying the possible motivations based on other U&G studies on social media (Lampe et al., 2010; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Smock et al., 2011) and further expands the list of motivations based on studies done by other researchers in the related area (Ebeling-Witte et al., 2007; Ellison et al., 2007; Lewis & West, 2009). Therefore, the current study intends to use U&G to address the research question below:

(i) What are the motivations behind Facebook usage among the Malaysian students?

4. Behavioural issues and Facebook

4.1. Brown's behavioural addiction framework

As individuals use the device more often to obtain pleasurable outcomes, excessive use leads to addiction (Orford, 2001). In Internet studies, it was found that using the Internet to regulate unpleasant moods, becoming attached to the social benefits the Internet provides, and perceiving more interpersonal control online than offline, leads to excessive use and the development of compulsions, withdrawal symptoms and negative social, psychological, and/or occupational consequences in the user's offline life (Caplan, 2002; Davis, 2001). Research on social media dependence has been conducted by many. For example, Nauert (2010) tested a "technology blackout" whereby 200 students were asked to go without media for 24 h (i.e. mobile phones, laptops, computers etc.). Results show the students to be in withdrawal, craving, anxious and even miserable. The students also expressed hatred for the loss of personal connections, as they felt that the strength of their relationships was based entirely on their use of social media. It was concluded that most college students are not just "unwilling, but functionally unable to be without their media links to the world" (Nauert, 2010).

Fenichel (2009) stated that social networking sites such as Facebook can "subconsciously be on the user's mind to the point where they do not even realise their behaviours or the amount of time they spend on Facebook – at work, at home, and now while on the move" (Fenichel, 2009). Some of the suggested behaviour cues to addiction include posting multiple messages daily that relate to mundane daily life activities, quiz results, or feelings, especially when those postings are at the expense of real life interaction. In Malaysia, psychologists are repeatedly emphasising on FAD among the younger users in the country. The New Sunday Times (2012)