

Do Students Prefer Various Social Networking Sites: Towards Understanding Kisii CBD Students Opinion

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Abstract: Social networking sites while sharing main aims of online communication and interaction, the users' preference and reasons for communication do vary. The aim of this study was to find out why University students prefer various social networking sites. The study participant consisted of 150 fourth year students and 6 heads of departments. Literature survey was used to gather general information about background of the study. Mixed survey design was adopted, Questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from the students and to find out their opinions for using social networking sites while qualitative data was collected using interviews, where heads of department were interviewed to validate the study. Data was presented in tables using frequency and percentage methods. The results of the study show Chatting/socializing was the most popular reason students used Social Networking Sites.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites, Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNS) may be defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to: construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system; articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.1). The world has been changed rapidly by the evolution of technology, and thus resulting into the use of technology as the best medium to explore the wide area of knowledge. The evolution of internet technology has led to its use as the best medium for communication. Two-third of the world's internet population visits social networking or blogging sites, thus serving as a communication and connection tool, whether from a personal, business or academic perspective (Boyd, 2007).

Student Participation with technology for social purposes, has become the mainstream communication method for many people in the past several years. In particular, students in universities have adopted these forms of communication as the paramount way to keep in touch with family and friends, Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp are the most popular places for these students to spend their time. What started out as a hobby for some computer literate people has become a social norm and way of life for people from all over the World (Boyd, 2007). Teenagers and young adults have especially embraced these sites as a way to connect with their peers, share information, reinvent their personalities, and showcase their social lives.

Recent reports indicate that the youth spend nearly 10 hours per day using some form of technology, with socially networked media playing a large role in their daily lives. With a comprehensive SNS exposure, student's access social networking sites frequently hence receiving accurate and wrong information.

SNS is popular in institutions of higher learning in Kenya, and university students are among the most avid users of SNS, spanning the whole cycle because among them are content creators, passive readers, active participants, those who just

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share and a few who embrace social media. The study was done in KU since, it is one of the fully chartered public universities in the region hence a representative of other higher learning institutions, as well as diversity of students who are potential users of Social Networking Sites. In addition the researcher is familiar with the institution and thus negotiating access did not pose a great challenge during data collection. The student base for the institution includes individuals from Kisii's cosmopolitan population, business and corporate organization within the central business district and its surroundings

The purpose of the study was to find out why University students prefer various social networking sites. To find out why University students prefer various social networking sites

2. LIMITATION

The study was limited with regards to how much information could be generalized to all university students. Out of a university with a student body of more than five thousand, only 30% of fourth year students participated, making it unlikely that all students in the university were represented from the sample. To minimize this, the researcher did stratified sampling where data was collected from six faculties, hence a representative of the whole population.

Second was with regard to the contextual scope; that the study covered only one organization and further using only fourth years. It would have perhaps been easier to get insights on why students preferred Social Networking Sites in other organizations

The concept of Social Networking Site:

The word social means the way one communicates in society, way you meet and spend time with other people. Network is the connection of parts together to allow movement or communication with other parts. Social networking is the connection of friends or family together which allow you to communicate easily. With social networking sites there is a long chain of friends to chat or share information or ideas with. SNS allows users to set up online profiles or personal homepages, and develop an online social network Boyd & Ellison, (2007).

The idea of "Social Networking" has existed for several decades as a way for people to communicate in society and build relationships with others (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). With the increase of technology used for communicating with others and the popularity of the Internet, "Social Networking" has become an activity that is done primarily on the Internet, with sites like Myspace, Facebook, Bebo, Friendster, and Xanga Coyle & Vaughn (2008).

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Social Networking Sites:

Individuals can use social communication networks for very different purposes. There are many social networking sites. Social networking sites, online interaction and communication at the same time sharing the main purpose and use of specific objectives in terms of layout may vary according to services. (Gross, Acquisti, 2005).

Social Networking Sites allow users to create a personal profile that can contain personal information, photographs, videos and sound clips. Currently, the top five most visited social networking sites are Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Whatsapp and LinkedIn, for the purposes of this study the researcher concentrated on Facebook twitter and Whatsapp because, in the recent years they have become the most visited websites in the world (Friedman, 2010; Nielson market research, may 4, 2010).

Social Network Sites have applied a wide variety of technical features, their backbone includes of visible profiles that display an articulated list of Friends who are also users of the system. Profiles are unique pages where one can "type oneself into being" (Sunde'n, J 2003). Joining a social network site, users are prompted to identify others in the system with whom they have a relationship. On the site-popular terms include Friends, Contacts and Fans. Most

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Social Network Sites require bi-directional confirmation for Friendship, but some do not. These one-directional ties are sometimes labeled as Fans or Followers, but many sites call these Friends as well. The term Friends can be misleading, because the connection does not exactly mean friendship in the everyday vernacular sense, and the reasons people connect are varied Baird, 2006).

The first social networking site in 1997, was founded with the same SixDegrees.com. This site were presented the opportunity to users create profiles and friends lists. In 1998, was allowed to surf on your friends list. Various ethnic groups in the years 1997- 2001 between personal, professional and they share their dating sites have emerged.

In 1999 Live Journal, Asian Avenue, Black Planet, Lunar Storm; In 2000 Mi Gente; In 2001 Cyworld and Ryze; In 2002 Fotolog and Friendster, Skyblog; In 2003 Couchsurfing, LinkedIn, Tribe.net, Open BC/Xing, MySpace, Last.FM, Hi5, Orkut, Dogster; In 2004 Flickr, Piczo, Mixi, Facebook (only in Harvard University), Multiply, a Small World, Dodgeball, Care2 (social network site was added), Catster, Hyves; In 2005 Yahoo!360, Youtube, Xanga, Cyworld, Bebo, Facebook (high school's network), AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, in 2006 Facebook, Windows

Live Spaces, Cyworld, Twitter, MyChurch were added. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Actually MySpace has more mail messages than Google, Yahoo, or Hotmail, such as 50 million mail messages for each day, 14 billion comments on the site, and 10 billion friend relationships (Owyang, 2008). This is an important growth show that the Nielsen net ratings from 2006 nearly total of 68.6 million users of all Social Network Sites, with MySpace users comprising of 38.4 million of the Social Network Sites population. Facebook is the sixth most trafficked site in the United States and its active users becomes double every 6 months (Owyang, 2008). Because of social networks in terms of information sharing point, Sancez (2007) 18 – person user community with his study of social networks and learning in these environments were found to be more fun.

Why Social Networking Sites:

Social Networking Sites allow students to express themselves, communicate, and collect profiles that highlight their talents and experience (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). To get technical and vocational skills which are very important for human development, Socializing with friends, doing sort of collaborative study, research or academic work, carrying out informal form of learning i.e. online degree, discovering and exploration of interests, both academic and future interest, doing some kind of online marketing, business, seminar known as webinar system etc., having to be informed will make one not to be deformed hence most youth tends to visit this social networking sites daily to get daily news information about what is going on round the country, within his or her vicinity, about friends, relatives, this is also an avenue of a citizen to bring the attention of the government to what is needed in their environment, or by suggesting to the government since it will not be possible for you sometimes to go to the office of whoever is in authority.

According to a recent study done on visual impression management and social networking sites, approximately 60% of adolescents will spend more time selecting which pictures to post on their profile than actually communicating with others (Siibak, 2009). This shows that these SNSs are not just for keeping in touch with classmates and meeting new people, they are used to build adolescent identities (Siibak, 2009). A number of factors including psychological effects; individual self-discipline and self-regulation concerns; human adaptability concerns are among the issues determinant on whether SNS helps or hurts a student academic performance.

The benefit of using SNS includes: creating room for creativity among individuals; encouraging greater social interaction via electronic mediums; it provides greater access to information and information sources; it give individuals a sense of belonging among users of the same SNS; reduces barriers to group interaction and communications such as distance and social/economic status; and increasing the technological competency levels of frequent users of social media (Zwart et al, 2011).

Internet usage has grown rapidly over the last few years. Users are able to build a network of connections that they can display as a list of friends. Most people have more friends on social network than they do in real life. It is important to note that the term 'friend', as used on a social networking site, is different from the way we approach it in the real life. The use of SNS is very common today.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A mixed approach was used to collect, present and analyze data. The researcher collected data using quantitative survey instruments and followed up with interviews with six heads of departments. Quantitative data was collected using closed ended questionnaires while qualitative data was obtained using open ended interviews. The survey study design was adopted in this study. A survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires to the 30% sample of stratified fourth years to obtain quantitative data, and interviews on six head of departments purposively sampled for further qualitative analysis and to ensure focused information Target population for this research was five hundred, fourth year students' in Kisii University and six head of departments drawn from six faculties. Among the faculties included: Education; Health sciences; Engineering; Agriculture; Information technology and Business and economics. While accessible population consisted six head of departments and 30% of fourth year students of KU which was 150. The study employed stratified sampling and purposive sampling to select representative respondents from accessible population.

The researcher identified subgroups in the population and their proportions to form a sample. A sample size of 30% of the total population of fourth year students using the sites were used which were 150. 25 students were randomly selected from the 6 faculties, faculties of Education, Business and economics, Information technology, Health sciences, Engineering and Agriculture, making it one hundred and fifty students in total. The researcher purposively selected six head of departments who were key informants for this study based on their: in-depth knowledge that served purpose of this study and virtue of their duties; experience; and judgment hence making them most desirable elements for the study. Questionnaires and interviews were the main data collection instruments used. Questionnaires were distributed to 150 student's respondents drawn from the six faculties. Since the study was concerned with views, opinions, perceptions and feelings of the respondents that could not be directly observed. While an interview guide for the respondents, with semi – structured questions were designed to help collect data on why University students prefer various social networking sites. And were meant to produce qualitative data that helped back quantitative data collected from the survey questionnaire. Data were collected using questionnaire and interviews. Data was presented on tables and Frequency and percentage methods were used during the analysis process.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Reasons for Accessing Social Networking Sites:

The researcher sought to find out respondent's reasons for preferring these sites. The researcher presented the following topic on: accessibility; time of access and hours spent.

Table 1. Reasons for Accessing SNS

Use	Frequency	Percentage
Chat/socialize	61	42.65
Knowledge	17	11.88
Academic matters	27	18.88
Entertainment	24	16.78
Research	12	8.39
Others	2	1.39
Total	143	100

According to table 1, reasons for using SNS by respondent's varied, chatting/socializing was 42.65%, 11.88% accessed SNS for general knowledge, 18.88% of the respondents accessed it for academic purposes, 16.78% of the respondents' used social networking sites for entertainment while 8.39% used the social sites in research and 1.39% used social networking sites for other unspecified reasons. In order to achieve second objective, which was to find out why students preferred these sites and responses were obtained from the survey questionnaire and face to face interview. Reasons for preferring these sites varied. Chatting/socializing was the most popular reason why students used Social Networking Sites, with 42.65% of participants. Also, 18.88% said they used the sites for academic, 16.78% for entertainment while 8.39% for research and 1.39% participants unspecified reasons. Further the researcher, asked the members of the faculty

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(Heads of Departments) on the reason why students preferred the social networking sites, and they all responded that it was because of chatting/ socializing. The findings concurred with the survey hence, consistent with Siibak (2009). An indication that SNS was majorly used for chatting/socializing.

Social Networking Sites Accessibility:

The researcher sought the view on accessibility of social networking site, as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. Showing accessibility of SNS

Accessibility	Frequency	Percentage
Very accessible	87	37.76
Somewhat accessible	47	7.69
Somewhat inaccessible	7	4.89
Very inaccessible	1	0.69
Not use social networking site	1	19.58
Total	143	100

According to the table 2, 37.76% of the respondents admitted to social networking sites being very accessible, 7.69% somewhat accessible, and 4.89% somewhat inaccessible, while 0.69% very inaccessible and 19.5% of respondent did not use social networking sites. An indication that, a good number which is, 37.76% of the respondents found SNS very accessible.

Time of Access:

The researcher sought to establish the time that the respondents accessed the Social Networking Sites, as shown in table 3 below.

Table 3. Distribution of time of access

Time of access	Frequency	Percentage
During Free time	95	66.43
During Lectures	7	4.89
When doing assignments	17	11.88
When Necessary	24	16.78
Others	0	0
Totals	143	100

As indicated in table 3, 66.43% of the respondents used social networking sites during their free time. In addition 4.899% of the respondents used the social networking sites during lectures and 11.88% of the respondents used social networking sites when doing assignments while 16.78% of the respondents used the social networking sites when necessary with none response on other options. An indication that a good number which is 66.43% of the respondents used social networking sites during their free time while no student had optional time for accessing the sites.

Hours Spent:

From the study, the research sought the response on hours spent on social networking sites per day as shown in the table 4 below.

Table 4. Distribution of hours spent

Hours	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 hours	115	80.41
5-10 hours	20	13.98
10-15	6	4.19
20+ hours	1	0.69
Total	143	100

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According to the table 4, 80.41% of the respondents spent 1-5 hours in a day checking on social networking sites, while 13.98 % spent 5-10 hours in a day checking social networking sites, 4.19% spent 10-15 hours in a day on social networking sites while only 0.69% respondents spent 20 hours and above on social networking sites hence an indication that a good number which is 80.41% of the respondents spent 1-5 hours on social networking sites.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

Implications of development are mostly seen in learning institutions. Most youths use social networking sites in their day to day engagements. In particular sharing knowledge on the internet plays an important role in the students' lives. However the rate and type of Social Networking Site is very crucial. Therefore it is a bit evident that SNS like Facebook, Whatsapp and twitter are popular. Several reasons were given as to why university students were using social networking sites. The most important reason given was socialization/chatting, and this was attributed to the fact that the sites were easy to access and readily available to students.

The researcher suggested that, universities should explore these sites to find out what attracts students to this type of communication.

Studies should be made on how these Social Networking Sites can be used in academics, and future research could focus on a much wider spectrum of dimensions relating to Social Networking Sites in learning institutions.

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