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The Effects of Social Media on College Students

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Abstract

As social media sites continue to grow in popularity, it is our premise that technology is a vital part in today's student success equation. This descriptive, exploratory research study drew a random sample (N=48) of males (n=26) and females (n=22) who were administered a student perception questionnaire on how social media affects college students. Thirty-five percent of the participants were undergraduates and 65% were graduate students, studying at Johnson & Wales University. Thirty-one percent of participants have full-time jobs, 30% have part-time jobs and 39% do not have jobs. The results of the survey questionnaire indicate that 45% of the sample admitted that they spent 6-8 hours per day checking social media sites, while 23% spent more than 8 hours; 20% spent 2-4 hours and only 12% spent less than 2 hours on this task. Results indicate while most college students use social media and spend many hours checking social media sites, there was a negative aspect to college students' use of social media.

Key Words: social media, college students, learning efficiency

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Introduction

The definition of social media is “the relationships that exist between network of people” (Walter & Riviera, 2004). In the last ten years, the online world has changed dramatically. Thanks to the invention of social media, young men and women now exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures and videos at a truly astonishing rate. Seventy-three percent of wired American teens now use social media websites (Oberst, 2010). Schill (2011) states that the social media sites encourage negative behaviors for teen students such as procrastination (catching up with friends), and they are more likely to drink and drug. However, every day, many students are spending countless hours immersed in social media, such as Facebook, MySpace, World of Warcraft, or Sim City. At first glance this may seem like a waste of time; however it also helps students to develop important knowledge and social skills, and be active citizens who create and share content. At present, whether social media is favorable or unfavorable, many students utilize these sites on a daily basis. As social media sites continue to grow in popularity it is our belief that technology is a vital part of today’s student success equation. Many researchers have been diving into a considerable amount of research on how social media influences student retention at colleges. Many parents are worried that their college students are spending too much time on Facebook and other social media sites and not enough time studying. Therefore, our research ascertains the relationship between the social media and students’ study efficiency.

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Statement of Problem

To address the issue of the effectiveness of using social networking, the first question raised in this study is: for what purpose is the student utilizing social networking? Research on this topic will start to reveal social networking sites are simply part of how students interact with each other with no apparent impact on grades. Thus, the objective of this research is to explore the advantages and disadvantages of students' use of social networking for study. The main purpose of this research is to expand on previous research, explore the relationship between the effects of social networking and students' study efficiency, and to determine if social media interfering with students' academic lives.

Research Questions:

Which is the most popular social media site for students?

What is the amount of time students spend utilizing social media in various academic processes?

Review of the Literature

College students have great interest in social media. For the purpose of this study, social media was defined as Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Twitter, MySpace or LinkedIn (Martin, 2008). Although, providing a detailed perspective on social media use among university students and underscoring that such use can produce both positive and negative consequences, according to a Nielsen Media Research study, in June 2010, almost 25 percent of students' time on the Internet is now spent on social networking websites (Jacobsen, & Forste, 2011). Facebook is the most used social network by college students, followed by YouTube and Twitter. Moreover, Facebook alone reports

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that it now has 500 active million users, 50% of whom log on every day. In addition, according to a study by Online PhD, students spend roughly 100 minutes per day on Facebook. In 2007, the number of students who used Facebook was already enormous: 92 percent of college students had an account. By 2008, 99 percent of students had an account on Facebook. That is quite a large amount considering the service was only opened in 2006 to everyone.

On one hand, the positive aspect of online communities is that youths can utilize them for academic assistance and support (Lusk, 2010). Due to the ability of social media to enhance connections by making them easily accessible, social media can yield many benefits for the young, including providing a virtual space for them to explore their interests or problems with similar individuals, academic support, while strengthening online communication skills and knowledge. “Students who may be reluctant to speak up in class are participating in book discussion blogs and writing for real audiences. There are new Web tools emerging all the time that are enhancing learning (Brydolf, 2007).”

On the other hand, “Our findings indicate that electronic media use is negatively associated with grades. We also find that about two-thirds of the students reported using electronic media while in class, studying, or doing homework (Jacobsen, & Forste, 2011).” This multitasking likely increases distraction, something prior research has shown to be detrimental to student performance. As social media websites, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter gain popularity, they are also becoming increasingly dangerous as they create modes to procrastinate while trying to complete homework. Hence, in a survey of 102 students, 57% stated that social media has made them less productive.

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As to the relationship between social media and grades, a study released by Ohio State University reveals that college students who utilize Facebook spend less time on studying and have lower grades than students who do not use the popular social networking sites (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Moreover, according to a new study by doctoral candidate Aryn Karpinski of Ohio State University and her co-author, Adam Duberstein of Ohio Dominican University, college students who use the 500 million member social network have significantly lower grade-point averages (GPAs) than those who do not. Nevertheless, another study found no correlation between heavy social media usage and grades. There was no significant difference in grades between those considered to be heavy users of social media and those considered to be light users. Additionally, there was no correlation between grades and the social media platform used. For example, almost the same number of heavy and light users of both Facebook and YouTube received the same percentage high and low grades.

Regarding the relationship between using social media with the grades of college students, concurrent with past studies that find that online communication is linked to time spent in offline relationships, “our findings indicate that Social Networking Site (SNS) use and cellular-phone communication facilitates offline social interaction, rather than replace it (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011)”. Students commonly commented that connect should be invaluable for making friends and supporting each other, especially within the first few weeks after arriving at the University (Oradini & Saunders, 2007). Furthermore, “The relationship between Facebook and well-being appears to become positive over the college years, possibly because upper-class students use Facebook to connect socially with their peers and participate in college life (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011).”

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Therefore, “we need to keep in mind that the benefits of this interactive technology far outweigh the risks,” says Leri. “When it’s used in a positive way, it can be an extraordinary tool (Brydolf, 2007).”

Method

The purpose of collecting data was to perform a group research on how social media affects college students. In this research, an anonymous questionnaire was administered to collect data which was the standard survey collection method. The total number of questionnaires administered were 50, however the usable questionnaires were (N = 48). According to the respondents, males (n=26) and females (n=22) were involved in this survey. Thirty-five percent of participants were undergraduates and 65% were graduate students currently studying in Johnson & Wales University. Thirty-one percent of participants have full-time jobs, 30% have part-time jobs and 39% do not have jobs. The number of females who have jobs is higher than that of males. This was one part of our anonymous questionnaire. In the following, other relevant questions were developed to carry out the research.

Other questions focused on the lives of students and the feeling of students when they were using different social media. For example, “How many hours a day do you check your social media site?” and “Do you post or respond while completing homework?” Also, at the end of the questionnaire, we asked two open questions about the biggest advantage or disadvantage when college students used social media in studying and looking back to the last time that they used social media.

The participants were randomly selected regardless of gender or educational level. These questions related to their lives. There were three different perspectives

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present in the research which included advantage, disadvantage or not sure. However, other independent variables were tried to decrease the impact on the results.

Results

Sixty percent of participants are in favor of Facebook, 22% like Skype, 10% prefer Twitter and 8% like My Space. Sixty-eight percent of the sample reported that they primarily used a laptop to check social media sites; while 20% use a cell phone; and only 12% preferred to use a desktop computer. Forty-five percent of the sample admitted that they spent 6-8 hours per day to check a social media site, 23% spent more than 8 hours, 20% spent 2-4 hours and only 12% spent less than 2 hours. The ratio of participants who posted or responded during school hours was 64%; 15% rarely used social media during school hours; 21% were not sure whether they would like to use it. Eighty percent of the sample reported that they posted or responded while completing homework; 8% would never use social media while doing homework; and 2% were not sure. In terms of the benefit of social media, 20% agreed that social media helps with school assignments; 25% agreed that social media helps to make new friends; and 55% just used social media for fun.

Discussion

According to the data we collected from the anonymous questionnaire, most college students would prefer to use social media and therefore spent vast hours checking social media sites. Facebook is very popular among college students, even though students would use it when they had classes. Ninety percent of students spent their time on entertainment; there were not too many college students who preferred using social

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media to deal with their homework. Eighty percent of the sample admitted that they posted or responded while completing homework. It has definitely affected their efficiencies and their grades. Considering the data collected, there was a negative attitude towards social media when college students used them. For instance, imagining one student spent over six hours checking social media site and responded while completing their homework; it would be likely increase distraction of the students which can be detrimental to student performance.

Conclusion

Our research has revealed that college students were likely to be affected by social media. Social media is attractive; it not only provides college students another world to make friends, also provides a good way to release pressure. To some degree, it absolutely affects the lives of college students including the grades. This research also indicates that an approach is needed to better balance the relationship between social media and academic study. Therefore, college students should think more about the balancing equation of social media and academics.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study was limited in several aspects. First, the timeframe to collect data was too short. Three to four weeks for the study was not sufficient. Second, a total of 50 questionnaires were administered, however usable questionnaires were 48, so the result may not reflect the real situation for the whole population. With this sample size, the estimated sample error is 14.4%, so an increase in sample size might yield different results. And, of course these results might be affected by this very large sample error.

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Third, this research did not consider student's psychological state; perhaps influences and motivations for social networking use.

Our research indicated that most college students would prefer to use social media and spend many hours checking social media sites. Social networking is definitely affecting students' efficiencies as well as their grades. Hence, educators need to be concerned about these problems and try to find better ways to solve these problems. Although, framed within an academic context, the concepts outlined here can be utilized to investigate the use of communication technology not only at school, however also at home, workplace, and various other settings, and for a variety of different audiences such as teenagers, young adults, the elderly, or families. For future research, it may be more helpful to measure the social presence besides motivation and pressure, examining how a student's psychological state influences motivations for social media use. Also, do social media sites have a positive influence on study and academics and are students leveraging them as cited sources in discipline research?

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