

STUDENTS' USAGE OF FACEBOOK FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to examine how Thai university students used Facebook for academic purposes and how public university students differed from private university students in this regard. This was an exploratory research where a questionnaire was used to collect data from 460 undergraduate students in Bangkok, Thailand. The data were then analyzed using Multivariate Analysis of Variance. The study found that Thai students used Facebook more to communicate and to share than to collaborate. This communication or sharing of information was more among the students than with their professors. It also found that private university students used Facebook to collaborate more than their counterparts at public universities.

KEYWORDS

Facebook, communication, sharing, collaboration

1. INTRODUCTION

Facebook is a significantly popular online social network. According to a survey of Go-Gulf.com conducted during the first three months of 2012, there are as many as 901 million Facebook users worldwide with more than 14 million of those being in Thailand –Asia's third largest country where Facebook users number is concerned (Go-Gulf.com, 2012). Other surveys in various countries of the world have similarly confirmed that Facebook is the most popular online social network among university students. There have been reports that as many as 85 to 99 percent of all university students are on Facebook (Hargittai, 2008; Jones & Fox, 2009; Matney & Borland, 2009).

Facebook offers applications people can use to communicate, to exchange opinions and to interact at multiple levels. It is basically used as a platform for social interaction. Facebook users can be both content creators and readers. For these characteristics, several leading educational institutions have adopted Facebook as a means to further develop their management. Therefore, Facebook has been used by many institutions in their communication with personal and with students. Teachers can use Facebook as a supporting tool inside and outside of their class to give the appearance of being in keeping with the times. The use of Facebook as an instructional tool is consistent with the needs of the learners as well. It allows the teachers to communicate with their students more quickly, encourages participation and involvement, as well as serves as a venue where learners can more openly voice their opinions, compared to traditional lecture rooms (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Pempek, Yermola, & Calvert, 2009; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010).

The study of Tiryakioglu and Erzurum (2011) surveying university teachers' opinions about social networks particularly Facebook as an educational tool found that 63.3 % of them agreed that Facebook helped communication between teachers and their students more effectively. Meanwhile, 61.2 % stated that Facebook was a tool for students to acquire information from classroom or institution. 58.3 % agreed that Facebook supported in grouping students on a basis of their interests or needs while 54.2 % believed that it was the effective tool which greatly affected the learner group's performance.

Furthermore, Grosseck, Bran and Tiru (2011) conducted a survey on the use of Facebook by university students in Romania. They found that most students used Facebook more for social purposes (e.g. keeping in touch with friends and family members, sharing photographs and tagging photographs) than for academic purposes.

Nowadays, significant numbers of Thai university students are on Facebook as well. Nevertheless, the use of Facebook for academic purposes may or may not be successful as it is dependent upon several factors such as the readiness of the institution in the procurement of equipment for online instruction, the readiness of the teachers in the use of Facebook inside and outside of classrooms, and the reception and the needs of the students where this is concerned.

Facebook are used by students mostly to discuss with their friends about assignments given by their professors or the lectures they have listened to. Students can use Facebook to exchange lecture notes and other materials. In their view, Facebook is a beneficial tool for education. They feel that Facebook is indeed a low-cost tool for the enhancement of knowledge in higher education.

In Thailand, undergraduate curricula are offered at public and private universities. The two types of institutions differ in terms of environment, personnel and ICT infrastructure. The students from public and private universities are typically of different natures as well. Public university students are more focused with their studies than private university students. Generally, private university students do not attend the class, so instructors need to find some strategies to attract their attention. One of those strategies is to use Facebook as an instructional tool. It is a popular social networking site equipped with tools designed for social interaction that instructors can organize for academic uses. Thai instructors can use Facebook as a channel to communicate with students and as a platform to deliver instructional content. Therefore, it is interesting to explore how university students are using Facebook to collaborate on academic related tasks.

The objective of this study is to compare the use of Facebook for academic purposes of public university students and private university students. Usage in this study is classified as communication, sharing and collaboration.

2. METHOD

2.1 Respondents

The population of this study was undergraduate students in Bangkok, Thailand. A total of 486 students were randomly selected at both public and private universities. Research assistants assisted with the conduct of the survey during class hours by distributing anonymous self-report questionnaire to the students and asking them to complete it in approximately ten minutes. Upon reviewing the completed questionnaires, a total of 460 copies or 94.7% of all were found to be valid. This was sufficient for further analysis.

2.2 Instrument

The tool used to collect data was a two-part questionnaire. The first part contained questions about their socio-demographic profile including gender, class-year and time spent on Facebook each day. The second part contained eleven questions about their usage of Facebook for academic purpose. The questions covered three aspects: communication, sharing and collaboration. The responses were evaluated on the basis of the Likert scale from one to five. This questionnaire was examined by three teachers for content validity and piloted with fifty students and a reliability analysis was performed. The inter-item reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of these items was 0.737, 0.654 and 0.776 respectively.

2.3 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used initially including frequency and percentage for description of sample group demographics and students' use of Facebook for academic purposes. Then data of Facebook usage got from public university students and private university students were compared using mean, standard deviation, and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA).

2.4 Results

2.4.1 Socio-Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

There were 460 respondents in this study. Overall, 53% were females and 47% were males, aged between 18 and 21 years. Of all respondents, 47.6% were public university students and 52.4% were private university students. The samples of public universities had a bit more females than males while those of private universities had a bit more males than females. The number of samples got from private universities was similar in four levels of years ranging from freshman to senior, but the great number of those got from public university were sophomore. Private university students had a little more average time of using Facebook than public university students. That is, private university students had an average Facebook time of one hour and twenty-eight minutes while public university students had an average Facebook time of one hour and twenty-two minutes a day. The detail was shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

	Public University (n=219)		Private University (n=241)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Gender				
male	104	47.5	136	56.4
female	115	52.5	105	43.6
Class year				
freshman	49	22.4	49	20.3
sophomore	80	36.5	63	26.5
junior	48	21.9	68	28.2
senior	42	19.2	61	25.3
Facebook time				
	Mean = 82.19 min		Mean = 88.24 min	
	SD = 81.11 min		SD = 69.30 min	

2.4.2 Usage of Facebook for Academic Purposes by Thai students

From Table 2, frequency and percentage of students marking on each statement were shown in five rating scale. There were eleven statements about the use of Facebook for academic purposes which belonged to three aspects. Regarding the aspect of communication, students used Facebook to communicate with other students in their course the most. That is, 44.6 % of them rated strongly agreed and 42.8 % chose to agree with this statement. As for the sharing aspect, it was found that percentage of the students rating “strongly agreement and agreement” on the three statements did not differ. Concerning collaboration, accessing course notes and other materials were chosen by Thai students the most when compared with the other three statements.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Using Facebook for Academic Purposes of Thai Students

Facebook Usage for Academic Purposes	Extremely	Very Frequency	Somewhat	Not very	Not at all
Communication					
1. Communicate with other students in my course	205 (44.6)	197 (42.8)	49 (10.7)	8 (1.7)	1 (0.2)
2. Communicate with the instructors	31 (6.7)	83 (18.0)	182 (39.6)	118 (25.7)	46 (10.0)
3. Communicate with university staffs	11 (2.4)	56 (12.2)	141 (30.7)	145 (31.5)	107 (23.3)
4. Keep track of university announcements	62 (13.5)	167 (36.3)	134 (29.1)	65 (14.1)	32 (7.0)
Sharing					
5. Exchange information with classmates	156 (33.9)	204 (44.3)	81 (17.6)	12 (2.6)	7 (1.5)
6. Send and receive information among friends with the aim to complete group reports	138 (30)	199 (43.3)	94 (20.4)	24 (5.2)	5 (1.1)
7. Exchange views with friends on class subject matters	96 (20.9)	201 (43.7)	122 (26.5)	31 (6.7)	10 (2.2)
Collaboration					
8. Access course notes and other materials	120 (26.1)	189 (41.1)	108 (23.5)	37 (8.0)	6 (1.3)
9. Participate in activities with the teachers	35 (7.6)	75 (16.3)	192 (41.7)	111 (24.1)	47 (10.2)
10. Complete quizzes provided by the teachers	38 (8.3)	98 (21.3)	182 (39.6)	95 (20.7)	47 (10.2)
11. Participate in activities or games which are a part of the coursework	37 (8.0)	83 (18.0)	186 (40.4)	98 (21.3)	56 (12.2)

2.4.3 Comparison of Facebook Usage between Public University Students and Private University Students

Facebook usage for academic purposes were categorized into three aspects namely communication, sharing, and collaboration. Regarding communication, both public and private university students used Facebook to communicate with other students in their course the most, followed by keep track of university announcements. However, it was interesting to see that public university students had higher mean scores than private university students in these two statements.

Table 3 also revealed that private university students used Facebook to collaborate more than their counterparts at public universities. That is, private university students used Facebook to complete group reports and exchange views with friends on class subject matters more than public university students while

exchanging information with classmates was used more by students in public universities than those at private universities.

When the four statements in collaboration aspect were examined, it was found that private university students used Facebook to collaborate more than their counterparts at public universities. Although students in both types of institutions used Facebook for accessing course notes and other materials the most, public university students seemed to use it more than private university students. However, students at private universities had higher mean scores of the other three statements than those at public universities.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Facebook Usage for Academic Purposes

	Public University		Private University	
	Mean	SD.	Mean	SD.
Communication				
1. Communicate with other students in my course	4.34	0.75	4.26	0.74
2. Communicate with the teachers	2.68	1.00	3.02	1.06
3. Communicate with university staffs	2.38	1.04	2.40	1.05
4. Keep track of university announcements	3.53	1.06	3.19	1.10
Sharing				
5. Exchange information with classmates	4.11	0.87	4.02	0.87
6. Send and receive information among friends with the aim to complete group reports	3.89	0.96	4.02	0.84
7. Exchange views with friends on class subject matters	3.67	1.00	3.81	0.87
Collaboration				
8. Access course notes and other materials	3.95	0.93	3.71	0.96
9. Participate in activities with the teachers	2.73	1.04	3.00	1.04
10. Complete quizzes provided by the teachers	2.83	1.08	3.09	1.06
11. Participate in activities or games which are a part of the coursework	2.70	1.08	3.05	1.07

From Table 4, it can be determined that Thai students used Facebook to share more than to communicate and collaborate. Although public university students had higher mean score of communication than private university students, but they had fewer mean scores of sharing and collaboration. From the statements which cover three aspects (communication, sharing and collaboration), the difference between public university students and private university students were compared using Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) to the conclusion with a significance of 0.05 that the use of Facebook for academic purposes by public university students and private university students differed only in the area of collaboration ($F = 4.255$, p -value = 0.040) with private university students using Facebook for collaboration more than public university students. No significant difference was found in the use of Facebook for communication and sharing between the two groups (see Table 4).

Table 4. Comparison in the Use of Facebook for Academic Purposes between Public University Students and Private University Students

	Institution	n	mean	SD.	<i>F</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
1. Communication	Public university	219	3.23	0.70	0.058	0.811
	Private university	241	3.21	0.74		
2. Sharing	Public university	219	3.89	0.81	0.694	0.405
	Private university	241	3.95	0.69		
3. Collaboration	Public university	219	3.05	0.81	4.255	0.040*
	Private university	241	3.21	0.84		

* $p < 0.05$

3. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion and discussion are presented as follows:

This study revealed that Thai students used Facebook for sharing more than communication and collaboration. This sharing occurred among the students themselves. This is due to the fact that students feel more comfortable to talk with their friends than teachers, university staffs and others. They may not want the teachers to know much about themselves. That is why the activity they feel free to do the most in the aspect of collaboration on Facebook is accessing course notes and other materials as shown in Table 3. Another reason is probably because Facebook has not yet become popular as an instructional tool for the teachers. The study conducted by Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-kane (2011) echoes that 77% of teachers use social media and for personal purposes. Only 60% of the teachers use social media for instructional purposes, and of this number, only 4% of the teachers actually use Facebook as a tool for the instruction. Teachers are not ready to use Facebook in their instruction because the growth in use of online social network is more evident in students and younger people than in elder population (Jones & Fox, 2009; Matney & Borland, 2009). In this case, although students would like to contact their teachers through Facebook, they cannot make it.

When making a comparison between the two groups of institutions, the study found that public university students used more Facebook for communicating with other students in the course as well as keeping track of university announcements than private university students who used more Facebook to communicate with teachers and university staffs. This may be because public universities tend to have better students who are able to catch up with the lessons. They rarely have problems in their study. Students at private universities often inquire and make a request of suggestion from teachers and people concerned in case they do not understand the contents or information.

However, using Facebook to access course notes is, therefore, the only one in the aspect of collaboration which public university students employed more than their counterparts at private universities. Since students at public universities are more focused on study and active, they tend to use Facebook to access course notes and other materials than private university students as demonstrated in Table 3. In spite of this fact, private university students were found to use Facebook for the purposes of collaboration more than public university students. Students at private universities got more involved with many collaborative activities on Facebook. This is possibly because of the fact that, by nature, private university students are less focused on their studies than public university students. Therefore, it is necessary for private university teachers to devise group work requiring the collaboration of students. On the other hand, the learning environment of public universities is more traditional with the teachers relying heavily on in-class lectures. There is no need for students to collaborate in their studies.

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