Facebook Usage Styles and Associated Socio-Psychological Apprehensions: A Gender Based Study

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Abstract

Social media brought revolutionary changes in human communication behaviour. Social media has turned information seeking into a two-way process. The users can not only get information through social media but they can also share information. Therefore, social media changed the way users seek information and changed their communication behavior. The study aims to examine usage styles of Facebook and associated socio-psychological apprehensions. The study utilized a survey method for collection of data. The results show that unwanted contents, privacy concerns, distraction from family life, addiction to the site, frustration and hyper tension are found to be the risks associated with Facebook usage. However, no significant gender differences are noted regarding the stated concerns. Nonetheless, significant gender differences with respect to Facebook usage styles are found to exist by the previous researchers.

Key Words: Facebook; usage styles; socio-psychological apprehensions

Introduction

When the first social networking site (SNS) came into being in the later part of 1990s, no one could even think that this small plant would grow into such a big tree of millions of branches. Today it has become a reality and the number of sites are

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increasing day by day and so their popularity, especially, among the youth (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). The basic purpose of introducing SNSs was mere social interaction and entertainment. With the passage of time some other functions were associated within the features of this new technology. That was why social media (SM) first attracted young folk in every society. People, especially, the youth across the world rushed to consume SM for multifarious purposes and for satisfying various needs.

Facebook is found to be the most popular SNS around the globe. The worldwide monthly active users of Facebook are estimated as 1.94 billion (Facebook, March 2017). Popularity of Facebook has compelled researchers in various disciplines like communication, sociology, psychology, political science, and information technology to carry out studies in the respective societies and add something to this emerging field of research. Some of the researchers are engaged in doing studies to investigate consumption styles of Facebook and their socio-political implications for the users. Others are busy in conducting research to have an insight into the mode of social interaction through the usage of this new technology.

Use of Facebook by young users has often been linked with positive effects in terms of the provisions of social interaction facility and consequent socialization of the users. Whereas, some of the researchers associate negative effects with the use of this site on the plea that frequent online interaction reduces the all-important offline and inter personal contacts.

Popularity of Facebook is increasing day by day among the youth in Pakistan. Facebook users in this part of the world spend hours of time for doing varied online activities. In excess use of Facebook, especially, by youth has been regarded as a matter of grave concern and the researchers are diverting their attention to investigate the problem. This research paper tends to be an effort in line with investigating using styles of Facebook and associated socio-psychological apprehensions.

Research Questions

1. In what ways the university students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa make use of Facebook?

2. Whether the users associate certain socio-psychological apprehension with Facebook use?

3. Whether any gender differences exist with respect to usage styles of Facebook and associated socio-psychological concerns?

Literature review

Facebook was created in Harvard University by Mark Zuckerberg, Chris Hughes, Dustin Moskoviz, and Eduardo Savarin in 2004 as a network for students to connect with their friends around campus and exchange information and contents. According to Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg, the sharing of contents and connecting of people around the clock with much ease and with great control over their contents were the notions behind establishing Facebook (Zuckerberg, 2011). Initially aimed at serving the Harvard University students only,

it took no time in expanding to other colleges and then to universities of the region (Abdulahi, Samadi, & Gharleghi, 2014). Popularity of Facebook can be ascertained from its rapid growth in the number of consumers. It was estimated that until 2009, the number of active users of Facebook were crossing over 90 million (Hendrix, Chiarella, Hasman, Murphy, & Zafron, 2009). In the early part of 2012, Lon Safko has estimated the number of active users as well over 800 million (Safko, 2012) and till June 2012, the numbers of active users of Facebook rose to 955 million around the globe (Facebook, 2012).

Facebook Usage styles

Before using a site like Facebook, one needs to create a profile by displaying personal information such as name, relationship status, one's own or someone else picture, profession, some videos, religious affiliations, ethnic group and one's personal interests. Making a list of friends and displaying the same on the personal profile to be watched and identified by other users is another feature of Facebook (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). This in turn let the users to navigate networks by searching friend's profiles, allowing one's social network to manipulate quickly (Walther, Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008; Ahn, 2011).

People make use of sites like Facebook for interaction with friends, sharing of contents, talking and texting with other users (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Most of the users make use of the technology on daily basis to maintain relationship with offline friends and to search for new friends with common

interests and socio-political views (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). According to another study, 91% of the teenagers make use of sites like Facebook for interaction with old friends (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). A gender based study found that 46% young males and 44% young females make use of such sites for interaction with other users. The same study further found that relatively old male users use SM for courting and meeting new people whereas, relatively old female users make use of SM to interact with people they know or meet in real life (Boyd, 2008).

Lenhart and Madden (2007) found that 49% of the youth use Facebook to create and maintain good friendly relations. The reason for this close friendship as Lenhart, Rainie, & Lewis (2001) contented was the users feel at ease in communicating with their friends on the internet than other forms of communication. Pempek et al., (2009), noted that on average young users have 358 friends on Facebook. While, West, Lewis, & Currie, (2009) found this number to be 200 on average. They argued that most of these online friends were people the users have remained in touch with in real life before online interaction. More than 80% of these online friends were within the same age group.

Aghazamani, (2010) noted that male students spend more time on Facebook than female students. However, While, Tufekci, (2008) found that females are supposed to consume SM four to five times more than their male counterparts. Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, (2010) contended that the young users spent an hour a day using Facebook. Whereas, Livingstone & Bober, (2005) suggested that the teenagers usually

spent a lot more time using SM. Dhaha & Igale, (2013) also note that more than 30% of Somali users spend 1-2 hours a day using Facebook.

Potential role of SM in connecting people and knowledge sharing has been made visible in almost all walks of life. Connecting teachers and students and subsequent knowledge sharing in the higher educational institutions has been the hall mark of this new technology. Interaction of students with their teachers through SM with regard to academic discussion is considered a new trend in teaching-learning process (Brown & Adler, 2008).

According to a study, 75% females and 68% males do their schools work by making use of SM whereas, 68% female students and 85% male students were found to play games on these sites (Media Awareness Network, 2005). Similarly, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, (2010) found gender as one of the most important variables that affect consumption patterns of SM. They believed that most of the female users of SM have accounts on Facebook while majority of male users maintain their profiles in the LinkedIn network.

Socio-psychological apprehensions

People have been debating over the implications of SM since its inception in the latter part of 1990s. These discussions have given birth to two opposite poles. At one pole, there are people who talk of this technology as necessary and totally useful for providing liberties, facilitating social interaction and ensuring some of the commercial benefits. At the other extreme, there are

people who believe in devastating effects of the technology. They consider use of this technology as very harmful in terms of deteriorating existing real life relationships, disturbing family life, inter-mixing cultures, causing cultural impurity, and degradation of moral values. However, there are people in majority who take a middle course. They think of SM as both useful and harmful for society. These people consider SM as beneficial but also associate some harms with its use. According to Berkman, (2008), the risks linked with usage of SNSs like Facebook do not out-weigh associated benefits. It is also believed that the disadvantages and risks with regard to the use of SM mainly depend on the nature of the site one uses and the pattern of behavior one adopts in using a site. According to the findings of the study, individuals with some behavioral problems in their real lives always remain at high risk of negative effects of SM. The adverse effects of these sites enumerated by Berkman include; emotional disorder by exposing to pornographic stuff, sexual harassment, violent sexual behaviour, and privacy concerns. Kowalski et.al, (2010) associates online bullying with hyper tension, depression and anxiety which sometimes results in commission of suicide. Cases have been reported where the victims have committed suicide following a series of spiteful comments and disgraceful contents on SM.

According to a study, 28% of Facebook users have shown concern over online harassment and appearance of annoying material and unsuitable stuff (Australian Psychological Society, 2010). Connolly, (2011) found that persistent use of Facebook had some negative effects as well. Its

use by the young users, especially, students can harm their cognitions. Its frequent use can divert student's attention from their studies and can hinder their mental capabilities. According to the same study, heavy users of online sites are more likely to be addicted to the site distracting them from their real life. Marginalized segments including women are more often at high risk of online harassment. Around 54% of such young people are reported to have faced online bullying. It has been investigated that 21% of the female users are one way or the other harassed mostly by the male users of Facebook (Blumenfeld & Cooper, 2010). Nie & Erbring, (2002) believe that online interaction reduces offline communication and disturb family life. According to the findings of the study of Rideout, (2010), majority of the young users of SNSs like Facebook who regularly go online have great number of friends and they feel very much satisfied in their lives with family and school mates. However, the same study found that heavy users of these sites often get fed off with it and feel sad, depressed and unsatisfied in their real life. In line with these findings, Hartup, (1996) notes that absence of intimacy in relations on SM and social disapproval adds to depression. Another problem which is linked with usage of SM is triggering of a type of battle among the users, especially, when certain provocative contents for mocking one segment of the users are posted and shared with other young users (Boyar et.al, 2011).

Social Media offer full freedom of expression where the users show off their expertise and skills in creating and sharing of variety of contents (Papacharissi, 2009). Their contributions in

the form of content generation and sharing are normally based on reciprocation. The users usually follow each other in the mode of designing content and their subsequent sharing with others. These activities on SM according to Benkler, (2006) let users to believe that their contributions are worthy which in turn help them increase their social connectedness. The same author mentions that the users not only share their self-produced contents but they also associate their own meanings according to their socio-cultural conditions and religious orientations to material shared by other users. To some, freedom with regard to expression on Facebook seems to be one of its positive characteristics but to others, this unbridled freedom of expression may become ominous in terms of hurting feelings of other users. It has been observed that some users upload very derogatory contents regarding some political leaders, religious figures, sports veterans, showbiz celebrities and even philanthropists. Such contents seem so defamatory that one cannot even think of revealing the same through traditional media.

Although the reviewed research studies have produced useful findings in line with consumption patterns of Facebook, however, most of the studies lacked investigation into the use of time spent by male and female students using the site. The current research aims at addressing this aspect of investigating the time spent using Facebook by the students along with other aspects related to the problem.

Method

Data was collected through questionnaire from a sample of 673 students drawn from seven universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The researcher made use of "Excel Sheet" and "SPSS" (version 23) for statistical analysis of the data. Descriptive statistics were used for obtaining data on simple statistics, frequencies and percentage. Likewise, simple mean test was administered to compare means of different variables. Whereas independent sample t-tests were applied to establish relationship of gender with Facebook usage styles and allied socio - psychological concerns with significance level ($P < 0.05$).

Results

Demographic Variables*:* The study found almost 2:1 ratio of males and females among the respondents. For detailed demographic results see table 1 below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Total
Gender	Male	443	65.8	672
	Female	229	34.0	
Locale	Urban	353	53.0	667
	Rural	314	47.0	
Age	18 – 22	431	64.4	
	23 – 27	161	24.1	
	28 – 32	40	5.97	669
	33 – 37	18	2.69	
	More than 37	19	2.94	

Facebook Usage Styles

Most of the respondents (89.8%) were registered Facebook users. Among them, 73% were using Facebook through their cell phones whereas 53% were accessing the site through PC/Laptop (see table 2).

Table # 2: Facebook Accounts & Mode of Access to their Accounts

		Frequency	Percent	Total
Account in Facebook	Yes	603	89.6	673
	No	38	5.6	
Mode of Access to Facebook	PC/Laptop	353	53.0	667
	Cell	490	72.8	

Independent samples t-test was administered to find out relationship of gender with mode of access to Facebook. Test result revealed insignificant differences in the means of males (1.46) and females (1.41) with regard to accessing the site through PC/Laptop. Similarly there were insignificant differences in the mean scores of males (1.22) and females (1.24) with respect to accessing Facebook through cell phones. Hence no significant relationship was found between males and females with respect to accessing Facebook either via PC/Laptop or via Cell phone ($P > 0.05$, $t < 1.96$) (see table 3)

Table # 3: Relationship of gender with mode of access to Facebook

Group Statistics	Your Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Via PC/Laptop	Male	431	1.46	.499
	Female	209	1.41	.493
Via Cell Phone	Male	431	1.22	.419
	Female	209	1.24	.433

Independent Samples t-test		EV		EM		
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.
Via PC/Laptop	EVA	8.406	.004	1.36	638	.17
	EVNA			1.37	416.5	.17
Via Cell Phone	EVA	1.398	.238	-.59	638	.54
	EVNA			-.59	400.1	.55

Note: N=number, M=mean, SD=standard deviation, SEM=standard error mean, EV=equality of variances, EM=equality of means, EVA=equal variances assumed, EVNA=equal variances not assumed

Similarly, 27% were found to login Facebook once a day. Around 40% respondents were spending 1- 2 hours on average a day using the site (see table 4).

Table # 4: Average Login frequency & Average Time spent using Facebook

		Frequency	Percent	Total
Login frequency	Once a week	115	17.9	
	2-5 times a week	111	17.3	
	Once a day	184	28.7	641
	2-5 times a day	127	19.8	
	More than 5 times a day	104	16.2	
Time spent	Less than one hour	190	29.6	
	1-2 hours	253	39.5	
	2-3 hours	83	12.9	641
	3-4 hours	74	11.5	
	More than 4 hours	42	6.77	

Likewise, table 5 reflects relationship of gender with login frequency and the time spent using Facebook. Results indicate insignificant relationship between gender and login frequency ($P > 0.05$ and $t < 1.96$). However, the findings suggest significant relationship of the gender with the time spent using Facebook ($P < 0.05$ and $t > 1.96$). This result infers differences in the mean scores of males (2.39) and females (2.12) with respect to the time spent using Facebook. Male respondents were more likely to spend more time using Facebook than females.

Table # 5:   Gender with frequency and time spent using Facebook

Group Statistics	Gender	N	M	SD	SEM
Frequently of login to SM	Male	431	3.01	1.28	0.06
	Female	209	2.98	1.36	0.09
Tie spent using SM	Male	431	2.39	1.29	0.06
	Female	209	2.12	1.21	0.08

Independent Sample Test		EV		EM		
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.
Frequently of login to SM	EVA	2.78	0.09	1.90	638.0	0.06
	EVNA			1.86	391.2	0.07
Time spent using SM	EVA	4.48	0.03	2.49	638.0	0.01
	EVNA			2.44	391.2	0.02

Data in the ensuing table reflects analysis of the respondent's online Facebook activities. Results indicate that around 90% respondents make use of Facebook to search/share information.

Table # 6: Online activities of Facebook users

Activities	Frequency	Percent	Total
Search/share different information	605	89.9	637
Search new friends	507	75.3	638
Chat with existing friends	490	72.8	639
Play games	488	72.5	639
Do academic assignments	454	67.5	638

The study found significant relationship between males and females with respect to the online activity - search new friends (p < 0.05, t > 1.96). Interestingly, female respondents (M=1.25) were inclined to use Facebook for searching new friends more than their male counterparts (M=1.17) (see table 7).

Table # 7: Gender and online activities

Group Statistics		N	M	SD	SEM
Search/ share different information	Male	428	1.04	.21	.01
	Female	208	1.05	.22	.01
Search new friends	Male	429	1.17	.38	.01
	Female	208	1.25	.43	.03
Chat with existing friends	Male	429	1.21	.40	.01
	Female	209	1.24	.44	.03
Play games	Male	429	1.23	.41	.01
	Female	209	1.26	.44	.03
Do academic assignments	Male	429	1.27	.44	.02
	Female	208	1.30	.46	.03

Independent Samples Test		EV		EM		
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig.
Search/share different information	EVA	.17	.68	-.20	63	.83
	EVNA			-.20	396.9	.83
Search new friends	EVA	21.7	.00	2.4	635	.01
	EVNA			-2.3	363.0	.02
Chat with existing friends	EVA	10.7	.00	-1.7	636	.08
	EVNA			-1.6	382.0	.09
Play games	EVA	7.0	.00	-1.3	636	.17
	EVNA			-1.3	387.8	.18
Do academic assignments	EVA	1.40	.23	-.60	635	.54
	EVNA			-.60	400.8	.54

Perceived Socio-psychological Apprehensions (Five items with Cronbach's Alpha = 0.74)

Basic concern of this study was to investigate socio-psychological apprehensions associated with Facebook use. Analysis of data was undertaken in terms of descriptive statistics as shown in table 8. Self-reported extent of agreement or disagreement with five statements was measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). High mean scores represent the level of agreement with the statements.

Table # 8: Facebook & Associated Socio-Psychological Apprehensions

Descriptive Statistics	N	Mini	Max	M	SD
Unwanted contents always appear on Facebook	617	1.00	5.00	3.20	1.07
Uploading private contents on Facebook entail privacy problems	620	1.00	44.00	3.31	1.97
Facebook use distract you from family life	618	1.00	5.00	3.31	1.12
Facebook usage cause addiction to the site	618	1.00	5.00	3.38	1.08
Facebook use can make you prey to cyber bullying	617	1.00	5.00	3.26	1.21

Similarly, results of the independent samples t-test suggest insignificant relationship of gender with five statements relating to the issue ($P > 0.05$ and $t < 1.96$) (see table 9).

Table # 9: Gender & Socio-Psychological Concerns

Group Statistics		N	M	SD	SEM
Unwanted contents always appear on Facebook	Male	414	3.21	1.05	0.05
	Female	203	3.17	1.10	0.07
Uploading private contents on Facebook entail privacy problems	Male	417	3.36	2.26	0.11
	Female	203	3.19	1.15	0.08
Facebook usage distract you from family life	Male	416	3.31	1.13	0.05
	Female	202	3.31	1.11	0.07
Facebook usage cause addiction to the site	Male	416	3.37	1.08	0.05
	Female	202	3.40	1.10	0.07
Facebook use can make you a prey to cyber bullying	Male	415	3.24	1.20	0.05
	Female	202	3.30	1.23	0.08

Independent Samples t-test		EV		EM				
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig.	M	SED
Unwanted contents always appear on Facebook	EVA	1.5	.21	-.73	619	.46	-.07	.10
	EVNA			-.74	416.8	.45	-.07	.10
Uploading private contents on Facebook entail privacy problems	EVA	.08	.77	1.04	618	.29	.17	.16
	EVNA			1.28	616.7	.19	.17	.13
Facebook usage	EVA	.27	.59	-.04	616	.96	-.00	.09
	EVNA			-.04	405.0	.96	-.00	.09

distract you from family life								
Facebook usage cause addiction to the site	EVA	.24	.62	-.27	616	.78	-.02	.09
	EVNA			-.27	389.8	.78	-.02	.09
Facebook use can make you a prey to cyber bullying	EVA	.22	.63	-.56	615	.57	-.05	.10
	EVNA			-.55	390.7	.57	-.05	.10

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was undertaken to examine Facebook usage styles and self-reported socio-psychological apprehensions associated with its use. Ninety percent of the respondents had Facebook accounts. Among them, 73% were going online via Cell Phone whereas, 53% were having access to the site through PC/Laptop. Easy availability of cell phones coupled with non-availability of electric power supply in Pakistan justifies this finding. Gender differences were not found in the mode of access to Facebook via Cell Phone or PC/Laptop. Login frequency of majority of the students was found to be once a day whereas, 1- 2 hours on average a day was the time spent using Facebook by most of the respondents. The finding is matching those of Livingstone & Bober, (2005); Dhaha & Igale, (2013). This study found that male respondents spent more time using Facebook than females which is not matching those of Tufekci, (2008) who explored that females spend more time on Facebook than males. Majority of the respondents were using Facebook to search and share

information, to search new friends, to chat with existing friends, to play games and to do academic assignments. These results are compatible with findings of the report of Media Awareness Network, (2005). Likewise, the study found that females use Facebook for searching new friends more than males. This finding, however, is not consistent with that of Boyd, (2008) who found that male users make use of Facebook to search new friends far more than females. This study found gender differences with regard to Facebook usage styles which are consistent with the results of the study of Lenhart, et. al., (2010). Unwanted contents, privacy concerns with uploading private contents, distraction from family life, addiction to the site and cyber bullying were found to be the risks associated with Facebook usage. The study nevertheless, indicated no significant differences between males and females regarding socio-psychological concerns. Berkman, (2008) however, believes that the risks linked with Facebook use do not out-weigh associated benefits. The disadvantages and risks linked with use of this technology mainly depend on the nature of the site one uses and the pattern of behavior one adopts in using a site.

This research paper is limited in its scope since number of other social networking sites like Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and WhatsApp are used in this part of the world. Similarly, usage styles of Facebook may include Facebook profiles and lots of activities they do online. Nonetheless, gender is an important variable in this study other demographic characteristics like age, locale and level of education seem to be very useful for such

studies. Research studies in line with addressing the stated issue need to be undertaken in future.

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