

USER PERCEPTION AND USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING AMONG THE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Social networking has become one of the online trends and has become a powerful communication tools. It not only provides a way to keep in touch with friends and relatives but also gives an opportunity to advance one's career in the respective professional fields. The present paper investigates the awareness of social networking sites among the students of the University of Swaziland. A structured questionnaire was prepared to collect the data which was used to assess students' use of social media in their day to day communication. Data was collected from a random survey of 600 students who visited the libraries in the three campuses. The data collected was analyzed using tables and graphs. The study shows that social networking sites have gained popularity and most of the respondents were aware of social networking sites. Social media functions as a significant communication tool in interacting with friends and relatives to discuss issues related to their study. Facebook and WhatsApp are the two mostly used social networks by the students.

Keywords: Social media; Internet; Social networking sites.

1. Introduction

The University of Swaziland (UNISWA) was established in 1982 by an Act of Parliament with a mandate to teach, conduct research and carry out community services. It comprises three campuses; Kwaluseni, Luyengo and Mbabane. The medium of instruction is English. The University offers Master's degrees, Bachelor's degrees, Diplomas and Certificate. To cater for the employed learners, the institution offers a limited number of programmes through Distance Education. It is the centre of academic and intellectual excellence. It has the responsibility of preserving and transmitting the nation's cultural heritage while at the same time contributing to the generation of new knowledge through research. The university provides programmes and courses that are relevant to the human resource needs of the country that are in line with regional and global trends.

2. Objectives:

The objectives of the study are:

- To establish the awareness of social networking sites;
- To establish the usage of social networking sites;
- To establish how much time they spend on their favorite social networking sites;
- To establish the purpose of using the social media;

- To explore the specific uses, preferences, and specialized academic social networking sites;
- To identify the social networking sites that are mostly used, and
- To establish how the social networking sites help students in their academic career.

3. Research Methodology:

To meet the specific objectives of the study a quantitative research methodology study along with a comprehensive literature review were employed. A structured questionnaire was prepared for collecting the data. A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed randomly to the students who come to use the library in the three campuses. A total of 493 filled questionnaires were received back, which translates to an overall response rate of 82%. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

4. Findings and Discussion:

4.1 Gender study

Sl. No	Male	Female	Total
1.	242 (49%)	251 (51%)	493 (82%)

Table 1: Gender of participants

Table 1 shows the gender of the respondent. Out of the 600 students 493 of them responded. It was found that 242 (49%) were male and 251 (51%) were female. The overall response rate is 82%.

4.2 How often do you usually log on to Social networking site?

Sl. No	Frequency	No. of respondent		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	I am constantly logged on	39 (16%)	40 (16%)	79 (16%)
2.	Once a day	13 (5%)	10 (4%)	23 (5%)
3.	Several times a day	66 (27%)	67 (27%)	133 (27%)
4.	Once in a few days	48 (20%)	30 (12%)	78 (16%)
5.	Once a week	22 (9%)	23 (9%)	45 (9%)
6.	Occasionally	33 (14%)	54 (22%)	87 (18%)
7.	Never	19 (8%)	25 (10%)	44 (9%)
8.	No response	2 (1%)	2 (1%)	4 (1%)

Table 2: Frequency of log on to Social networking site.

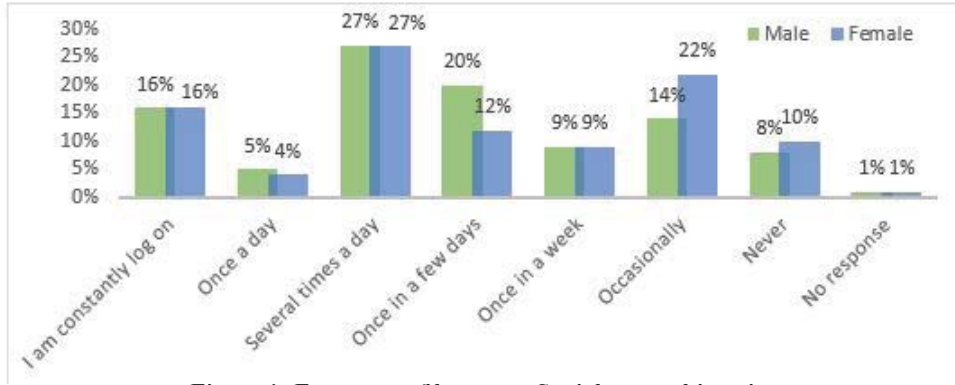


Figure 1: Frequency of log on to Social networking sites

Figure 1 shows that the frequency at which students log on to their favorite networking sites varies significantly. The graph indicates that 27% both male and female students log on several times a day regardless of whether they use it for long time or for a short period of time. However, 20% male students visit the sites once in few days while 22% of the female students visit occasionally.

4.3. How much time (on average) do you spend on your favorite social networking site(s) per session?

Sl. No	Time	No. of respondent		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	Less than an hour	135 (56%)	111 (44%)	269 (55%)
2.	1 hour	35 (14%)	58 (23%)	93 (19%)
3.	2 hour	16 (7%)	27 (11%)	43 (9%)
4.	More than 2 hour	27 (11%)	19 (8%)	45 (9%)
5.	No response	24 (10%)	28 (11%)	52 (11%)
6.	Not at all	5 (2%)	8 (3%)	14 (3%)

Table 3: Time spent on favorite social networking sites.

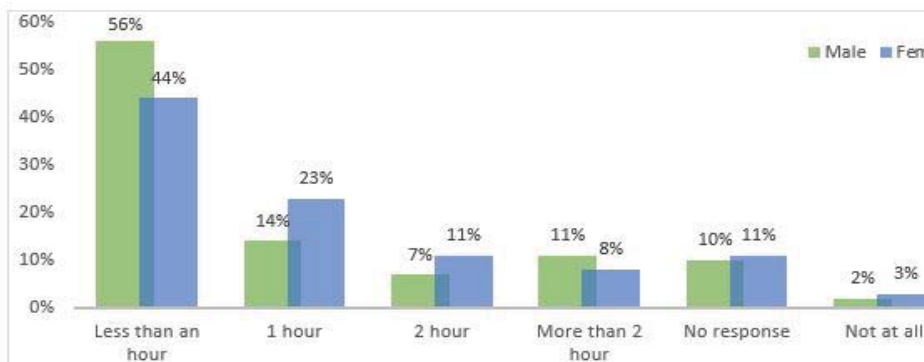


Figure 2: Time spent on to social networking sites

Figure 2 indicates the time spent by the students on the social networking sites. The longest time spent was less than an hour with highest number of students where male students stood at 56% whilst 44% were female students. Although they logged on for a shorter period of time, the graph shows that social networking has been playing an important role in their lives. A small percentage of the students did not use the social networking sites at all. This could be attributed to lack of awareness.

4.4. Please rate how often you use Social Networking services:

Sl. No.	Purpose	Do not use		Very rarely		Quite often	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1.	Find some information	25 (10%)	34 (14%)	35 (15%)	52 (21%)	82 (34%)	70 (8%)
2.	Get opinion	28 (12%)	36 (14%)	79 (33%)	75 (30%)	75 (31%)	70 (28%)
3.	Entertain yourself	36 (15%)	52 (21%)	48 (20%)	63 (25%)	67 (28%)	71 (28%)
4.	Socialize	27 (11%)	38 (15%)	52 (22%)	58 (23%)	65 (27%)	80 (32%)
5.	Stay-up-to date	20 (8%)	26 (10%)	49 (20%)	48 (19%)	89 (37%)	85 (34%)
6.	Share your experience	62 (26%)	65 (26%)	82 (34%)	86 (34%)	55 (23%)	52 (21%)
7.	Get freebies	108 (45%)	124 (49%)	65 (27%)	56 (22%)	17 (7%)	30 (12%)

Table 4: Use of social networking sites (by gender)

Sl. No.	Purpose	Very often		No response	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1.	Find some information	55 (23%)	65 (26%)	45 (19%)	30 (12%)
2.	Get opinion	40 (17%)	55 (22%)	20 (8%)	15 (6%)
3.	Entertain yourself	75 (31%)	52 (21%)	16 (7%)	13 (5%)
4.	Socialize	85 (35%)	58 (23%)	13 (5%)	17 (7%)
5.	Stay-up-to date	66 (27%)	72 (29%)	18 (7%)	20 (8%)
6.	Share your experience	27 (11%)	43 (17%)	16 (7%)	5 (2%)
7.	Get freebies	27 (11%)	20 (8%)	25(10%)	21 (9%)

Table 5: Use of social networking sites (by gender)

S I . No.	Purpose	Do not use	Very rarely	Quite often	Very often	No re- sponse
1.	Find some information	59 (12%)	87 (18%)	152 (31%)	120 (24%)	75 (15%)
2.	Get opinion	64 (13%)	154 (31%)	145 (29%)	95 (19%)	35 (7%)
3.	Entertain yourself	88 (18%)	111 (23%)	138 (28%)	127 (26%)	29 (6%)
4.	Socialize	65 (13%)	110 (22%)	145 (29%)	143 (29%)	30 (6%)
5.	Stay-up-date	46 (9%)	97 (20%)	174 (35%)	138 (28%)	38 (8%)
6.	Share your experience	127 (26%)	168 (34%)	107 (22%)	70 (14%)	21 (4%)
7.	Get freebies	232 (47%)	121 (24%)	47 (10%)	47 (10%)	46 (9%)

Table 6. Table showing the use of social networking sites by the students.

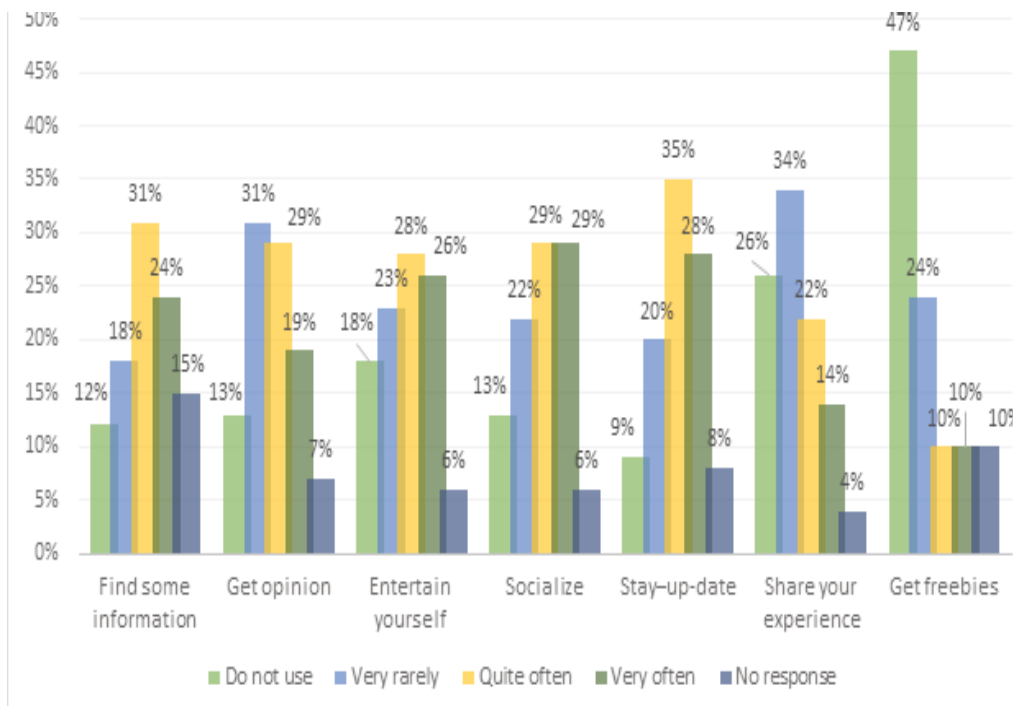


Figure 3. Graph showing the use of social networking sites by the students.

From the above graph it is seen that the students used the social networking for different purposes. The graphs rate how often they use Social Networking services. Quite often they used

31% for finding information

29% to get opinion

28% to entertain themselves

29% to socialize

35% to stay up –to -date

22% to share their experience

10% to get freebies.

Very often they used:

24% for finding information

19% to get opinion

26% to entertain themselves

29% to socialize

28% to stay up –to -date

14% to share their experience

10% to get freebies.

Very rarely they used:

18% for finding information

31% to get opinion

23% to entertain themselves

22% to socialize

20% to stay up –to -date

34% to share their experience

24% to get freebies.

Thus we see that the students use the social networking sites quite often to stay up to date. They also use the sites very often to socialize but they very rarely log on for sharing their experiences. Very few of the students use social networking sites for freebies.

4.5. Which of the following social networking media you use? (Tick as many as it applies to you).

Sl. No	Social networking sites	No. of respondent		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	Facebook	187 (77%)	159 (63%)	346 (70%)
2.	WhatsApp	107 (44%)	113 (45%)	220 (45%)
3.	GooglePlus	78 (32%)	92 (37%)	170 (35%)
4.	MySpace	10 (4%)	7 (3%)	17 (3%)
5.	Twitter	45 (19%)	34 (14%)	79 (16%)
6.	Any other	33 (14%)	41 (16%)	74 (15%)

Table 7: Table showing the social networking sites used.

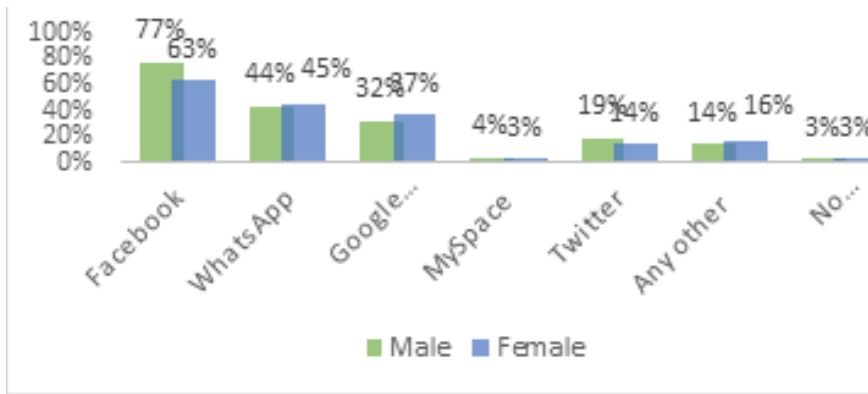


Figure 4: Graph showing the name of the social media used.

The above graph indicates which social media the students are using. As seen in the graph most of the students used Facebook, WhatsApp followed by GooglePlus. The least used is MySpace. Facebook is the most popular as it accounts for 77% male and 63% female students. Facebook provides an easy way of sharing information with friends, acquaintances and even strangers (Boyd, Ellison 2007). Facebook is said to be the most used social media in the world (Christofides, Muise and Desmarais, 2008). The column in the graph on *any other* indicates the social networking sites like the LinkedIn, Instagram, blocks, Flickr, Wikis etc. Twitter is also used by some of the students.

4.6. What is the key reason(s) for you to join a community/group in a social networking service? (Tick as many as applied to you).

S I . No	Purpose	No. of respondent		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	It is relevant, active and interesting community	87 (36%)	83 (33%)	170 (35%)
2.	Stay up-to-date with the community	138 (57%)	105 (42%)	243 (49%)
3.	Meetings with like professionals	51 (21%)	39 (16%)	90 (18%)
4.	Communication of research output	37 (15%)	36 (14%)	73 (15%)
5.	Creating awareness on new methods	44 (18%)	21 (8%)	65 (13%)
6.	Stay in touch with family and friends	66 (27%)	48 (19%)	114 (23%)
7.	Sharing knowledge with others	114 (47%)	101 (40%)	215 (44%)
8.	Improving organizational visibility	55 (23%)	49 (20%)	104 (21%)
9.	Reaching out to people to gain valuable ideas	96 (40%)	95 (38%)	191 (39%)
10.	Asking questions from professional colleagues	61 (25%)	48 (19%)	109 (22%)
11.	No response	6 (3%)	8 (3%)	14 (3%)

Table 8: Table showing the reason for joining the social network

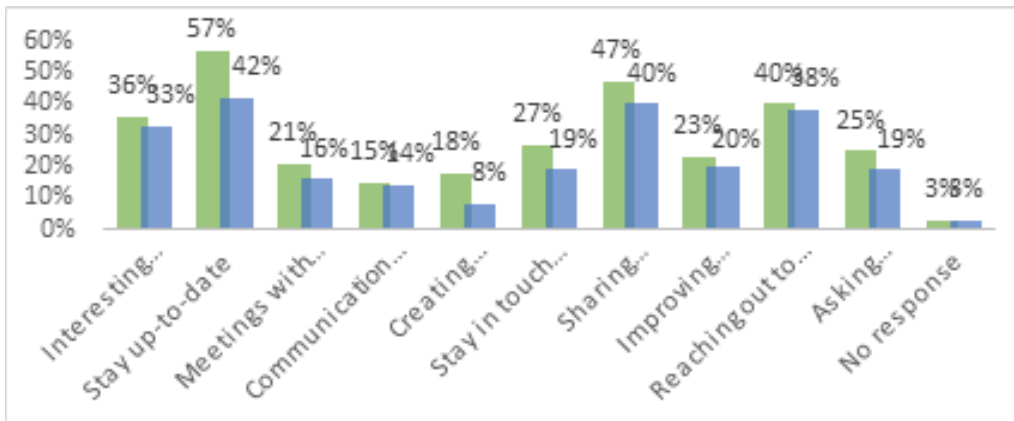


Figure 5: Graph showing the reason for joining the social network.

The above graph shows the reason for joining the social networking sites. They have joined it for different reasons, but mostly to stay up-to –date with the community, to share knowledge with others and also to reach out to people to gain valuable ideas.

4.7. Does Social media help you? (Tick as many as applied to you)

S I . No	Purpose	No. of respondent		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	In finding a mentor	48 (20%)	26 (10%)	74 (15%)
2.	Publishresearch work faster	53 (22%)	46 (18%)	99 (20%)
3.	Gain more visibility in your area(s) of research	62 (26%)	58 (23%)	1 2 0 (24%)
4.	Help in dissemination of information	82 (34%)	70 (28%)	1 5 2 (31%)
5.	Connect with researchers with similar interest	48 (20%)	48 (19%)	96 (20%)
6.	Expose to latest knowledge, skills & technology	162 (67%)	150 (60%)	3 1 2 (63%)
7.	Find institutions suitable for research	77 (32%)	50 (20%)	1 2 7 (26%)
8.	Any other	4 (2%)	6 (2%)	10 (2%)
9.	No response	7 (3%)	10 (4%)	17 (3%)

Table 9 Table showing how social media help them.

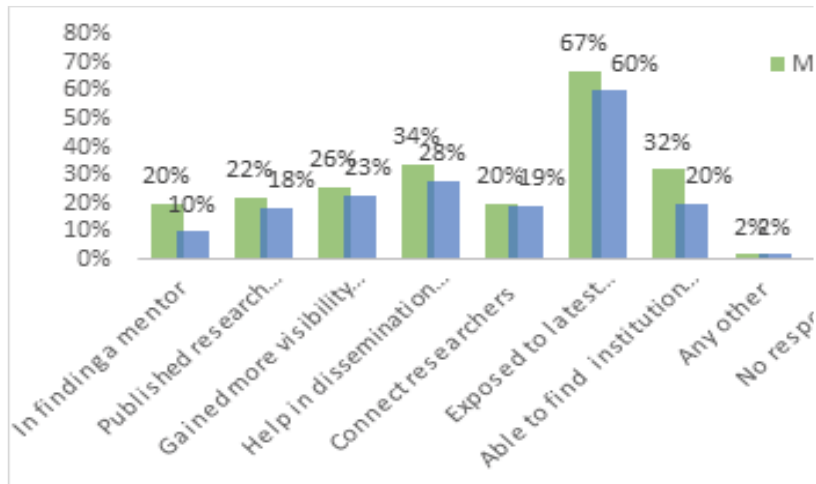


Figure 6: Graph showing how social media help them.

The above graph shows how social media is helping in one way or the other. Out of the 600 students 67% male and 60% female claimed that it helped to expose them to the latest information skills and technology. On the other hand, 34% male and 28% female students indicated that it has helped greatly in the dissemination of information. It also helped them in finding suitable institutions for research while at the same they were able to gain more visibility in their areas of research.

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the use of social networking sites by undergraduate students in the University of Swaziland. Understanding the perception and behavior of students is very important for the information professionals who are trying to understand the information needs of the young generation in order to be relevant in the service delivery. The findings indicated that the majority of students using Facebook and WhatsApp heavily. The findings also showed some lack of experience with social networking beyond entertainment, which confirms the need to educate students on the benefits of social networking sites and the quality of information found on these sites. Further investigation is needed to gain a better understanding on the use of social networking sites by other students. Based on the research findings some recommendations are made:

Students should subscribe and maintain multiple accounts on social networking sites;

They should be mandated to publish their results on the web;

Students should be encouraged to network and collaborate with colleagues from other institutions;

Increase the infrastructure of ICT ;

Extension of wireless networking.

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