The impact of Facebook on Zimbabwean University students: Culture Dilution or Pedagogical

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Abstract

The study sought to establish consumer attitudes towards the effect of one Social Network Site (SNS), Facebook on culture dilution or pedagogical potential among university students. This has been necessitated by a plethora of unique social interactions in this era of technological affordances. Many SNSs are in use: Facebook, MySpace, Cyworld, Bebo, WhatsUp, LinkedIn, ChatOn, Opera Mini, Twitter and other new forms keep on emerging. However, of interest Facebook was used in this study because it is impacting the ways in which university students use the Internet. Technology has mediated communication in countless ways. The values and norms of culture have to be cherished the young generation. In investigating this problem, two hundred (200) students were interviewed at their university campus in Zimbabwe. The sample comprised students from Great Zimbabwe University. The research findings proved that Facebook contributes to the dilution of the Zimbabwean culture. It was also interesting to note that other students see the pedagogical potentials of Facebook.

Key words: social network sites, Facebook, consumer attitudes, culture dilution, pedagogical potential

Literature Review

Social networking sites can be valuable sales and marketing tools, as well as fun diversions. Since their introduction, social network sites (SNSs) such as MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into daily practices (Danah & Nicole 2007).

Researchers see SNSs as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. Millions of people have joined social networking sites, adding profiles that reveal personal information. However, reputation of social networking sites has been diminished by a number of incidents publicized by the news media (Chiaramonte and Martinez, 2006, Hass, 2006, Mintz, 2005, Read, 2006). Is it possible to join a network of millions of people and be able to have your culture undiluted? This does not seem realistic. Since university students are obviously joining networks and revealing information, what impact do social networking sites have on culture and pedagogics?

Boyd and Ellison (2007) write: "What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between "latent ties" (Haythornthwaite, 2005). On many of the large social networking services, participants are not necessarily "networking" or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network (Boyd & Ellison (2007). Thus the argument suggests that even Facebook is used in the same vein.

Ninety-six percent of the young people surveyed reported using some form of social networking technology, and the findings indicated that education-related topics are the most common, with 60% talking about education-related topics and 50% discussing their schoolwork (Boyd & Ellison (2007). What is clear is that young people regard social networking sites as just another part of their social and often school-related activities.

WHAT DO PEOPLE DO ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES?

There is an ongoing debate concerning potentials of different forms of social interaction: groups, communities, collectives, connections and networks (Dron & Anderson 2007; Downes 2007; Wenger et al. 2005; Anderson 2008; Ryberg & Larsen 2008; Jones 2004; Jones et al. 2006; Siemens 2005). The debate has its origin in the concept of network, which challenges a number of other forms of social relations. As Dron & Anderson (2007) state, research and practice of e-learning has primarily focused on groups. They describe groups as "individuals who see themselves as part of that group". However, the approach also stresses that individual activities are always situated in a collective practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). Individual activities always serve an objective, which relates to an overall collective activity (Bang & Dalsgaard 2006). In fact words, activities are collective (Leont'ev 1978; Engeström 1987). The objective is not community-building or collaboration, but increased awareness. Supporting awareness within a learning environment is the focus of pedagogical potentials of social relations, researchers argue. This can also imply that at universities, students should make use of each other, since their work is relevant to each other.

Currently, there are no reliable data regarding how many people use SNSs, although marketing research indicates that SNSs are growing in popularity worldwide (comScore, 2007). The popularity of social networking sites has increased at astonishing levels. Usefulness of sites such as Facebook, WhatsUp and LinkedIn has soared up in Zimbabwe.

FACEBOOK

Facebook, a social networking site that began with a focus on colleges and universities, attracted studies by Acquisti and Gross, 2006, Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield, 2007, Stutzman, 2006. They show that Facebook members reveal a lot of

information about themselves, and are not very aware of privacy options or who can actually view their profile (Acquisti and Gross, 2006).

The researchers acknowledge that in September 2005, Facebook expanded to include high school students, professionals inside corporate networks, and, eventually, everyone. Three of the most popular features of Facebook are the ability to add Friends, update one's status and run applications such as games and quizzes. A "Friend" is anyone on the Facebook network whom one allows to see various levels of personal information, such as job, birth date, photos, group membership, comments and list of other Friends. Friends can also see Friends of Friends, and may never have met, may have visibility into personal information and whereabouts (Acquisti and Gross, 2006).

Scholars are documenting the implications of SNSs use with respect to schools, universities, and libraries. For example, scholarship has examined how students feel about having professors on Facebook (Hewitt & Forte, 2006) and how faculty participation affects student-professor relations (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). Zimbabweans are people who uphold culture but universities have profusely increased and students use SNSs. It is against this background that the impact of SNSs on culture or education should be explored.

METHODOLOGY

The target population of the research was all fulltime university students in their first, second, third and fourth years of study. Due to the geographical spacing of universities and the large numbers of enrolment figures in universities it was not possible to send a questionnaire to all universities. A sample was collected from Great Zimbabwe University only. Stratified sampling was then applied taking level of study as a stratum. A series of linear regression were performed.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between Facebook visits and educational purposes

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.357	.286		4.747	.000
	visits	.214	.092	.164	2.334	.021

   a.   Dependent Variable: educational purpose

A one unit increase in Facebook visits increases educational purpose by 0.164 units. Facebook visit is significant in explaining educational purpose as given by the t-ratio of its coefficient 2.334 which is greater than 1.96. The hypothesis that Facebook visit is not for educational purposes is therefore rejected because some students use the Facebook for education.

Facebook visits and culture dilution

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.086	.241		4.501	.000
	visits	.571	.077	.464	7.378	.000

a. Dependent Variable: culture dilution

One unit increase in Facebook visits increases culture dilution by 0.464 and Facebook visit is very significant as depicted by the t-ratio of its coefficient 7.378 which is far greater than 1.96. The hypothesis that Facebook visit causes culture dilution is accepted.

The relationship between number of visits on Facebook and posting of bad behavior

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.536	.234		10.826	.000
	visits	.071	.075	.067	.950	.343

   a.   Dependent Variable: bad behavior

The table shows that a one unit increase in Facebook visits increases the bad behavior by 0.067 units. However, the influence of Facebook visits is not significant as measured by the t-ratio of its coefficient, 0.950, which is not close to 1.96. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected because not every student who visits Facebook has the intention of posting bad behavior.

The overall perception on Facebook's impact on culture dilution

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.890	.177		5.023	.000
	Overall perception	.749	.066	.629	11.388	.000

a.   Dependent Variable: culture dilution

There is a one unit increase in overall perception of Facebook visits which increases culture dilution by 0.629 units. Overall perception is significant in explaining culture dilution as given by the t-ratio of its coefficient 11.388. Thus the overall perception that Facebook visits increases culture dilution hypothesis, is accepted.

The effect of level of study and number of visits on bad behavior on Facebook

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.786	.539		10.743	.000
	level	-.867	.132	-.423	-6.568	.000
	visits	.071	.068	.067	1.046	.297

a. Dependent Variable: bad behavior

The level of study is significant in explaining bad behavior as measured by the t-ratio of its coefficient -6.568. Whilst Facebook visits have some positive influence on bad behavior, it is not significant.

Impact of Facebook visits, gender, program and level of study on culture dilution

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.634	1.290		2.042	.043
	visits	.580	.084	.471	6.907	.000
	gender	.325	.180	.126	1.808	.072
	program	-.265	.142	-.161	-1.868	.063
	level	-.427	.210	-.180	-2.030	.044

a. Dependent Variable: culture dilution

A one unit increase in the level of study, decreases culture dilution by 0.180 units and the level of study is significant in explaining culture dilution. On the other hand, the program decreases culture dilution and it is not significant.

Overall perception on negative experience, abusive language, bad behavior, posting of something bad on Facebook and dilution of culture

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.249	.176		1.420	.157
	Negative	.368	.075	.343	4.894	.000
	abusive	-.306	.112	-.253	-2.742	.007
	Bad behavior	.180	.063	.185	2.860	.005
	Postings	.398	.090	.439	4.422	.000
	Culture dilution	.221	.071	.263	3.109	.002

a. Dependent Variable: overall perception

The overall perception about Facebook is that it is not generally used for educational purposes but otherwise for abusive language and posting of bad behavior that lead to culture dilution. There is need to promote university students to use it meaningfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It should be brought to the attention of the university students that Social Network Sites are also there for their educational use. Although some already employ the Facebook for sharing assignment, presentation and research information, its promotion may widen their pedagogical potential horizon. Secondly, students have to uphold Zimbabwean cultural values and norms when they communicate through Social Network Sites.

On the other hand, the work described in this paper contributes to an on- going discussion about the importance of social network sites. Vast, uncharted waters still remain to be explored. Scholars still have a limited understanding of what Facebook does to the Zimbabwean culture, especially in universities. Such a question requires large-scale quantitative and qualitative research. I hope that the work described here and included in this collection will help build a foundation for future investigations of issues surrounding other social network sites and the Zimbabwean culture.

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