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The Reasons for Non-Use of Social Networking Websites by University Students

Abstract

Although social networking websites (SNSs, especially Facebook) have become highly popular with youths, some university students do not want to participate in such sites. This study explores the underlying reasons for high-tech university students' non-use of social networking websites. The study group (n=20) consisted of 18 to 25-year-old undergraduate students, who were selected by the purposive sampling method. Data were collected from two large state universities in Turkey. Facebook, as one of the most popular social networking websites, was selected as a study context. Qualitative research methods were used in the data collection and analysis processes. The primary reasons for not using social networking websites were that they were perceived to be a waste of time, or an unnecessary tool; that they might lead to an addiction; that they might violate privacy concerns or share unnecessary information; and that they might invoke family concerns. Additionally, the findings indicated that most of the students did not trust virtual friendships, and did not like sharing photographs and political views online. This identification of non-user students' attitudes about SNSs will help us to better understand individual perceptions and experiences relating to these social services.

Keywords

Social networking websites, Facebook, university students, dilemmas, social media, social services.

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1. Introduction

The Internet is now very popular, and it has powerfully affected almost every aspect of our world, from commerce to education. It has even changed many people's daily lifestyles (Martin, Diaz, Sancristobal, Gil, Castro & Peire, 2011; Ceyhan, 2008). Some of the biggest Internet effects involve communications among people. Social networking websites (SNSs) offer a new way to understand, connect with, and learn information about other people (Carpenter, Green & LaFlam, 2011). SNSs are now often used for communications, to build relationships and to make new friends (Pew, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Social networking on the Internet has increased rapidly in both prevalence and popularity in recent years, especially among university students (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009; Vrocharidou & Efthymiou, 2012). The current generation of young people has grown up with access to computers and the Internet, and thus, many appear to have a natural ability and high skill levels when using new technologies. This is actually because a large portion of their daily lives is spent using the Internet, SNSs, digital tools, computer games, e-mail, mobile phones and instant messaging (Prensky, 2001). They frequently have computer and Internet access in their houses, dormitories and schools (Ahn, 2011). Hargittai (2008) reported that when students have access to the Internet at a friend's or family member's house, this increases the likelihood of their use of both Facebook and MySpace. However, an interesting fact is that, among high-tech students who can easily access and use technological devices – and who are very interested in computers and the Internet generally, a considerable number of students do not use SNSs (Harper, 2006). This study employs the term «non-user» to refer to people who do not use any social networking sites or to those who do not use a specific site.

The social networking website Facebook was selected for use in this study, because it is the most popular and most frequently visited social networking website among university students (eBizMBA, 2012). Facebook's statistics (March, 2012) report that there are 901 million monthly active users who create profiles, interact with Facebook objects, leave comments for friends, upload photos, and/or connect to community pages, groups, and events. These figures also attest to the popularity of Facebook. Recent studies have reported that a large proportion of students claimed they spent between 10 and 60 minutes on Facebook per day (Ross, Orr, Sisic & Arsen, 2009; Stern & Taylor, 2007). However, despite the widespread use of Facebook among young people, there are many deliberate non-users of Facebook in this age category.

Given the prevalence of SNSs and their importance in young people's lives, it is important to understand the factors which influence SNS use. The popularity of Facebook among young people has attracted the attention of many researchers, and several studies have examined the use of Facebook from different perspectives (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011; Hew, 2011; Green & Bailey, 2010; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Among the discovered reasons for student participation in Facebook are communicating with friends, looking at or posting photos, entertainment, finding out about or planning events, sending or receiving

messages, creating or reading wall posts, getting to know people better, getting contact information and presenting oneself to others through the content in one's profile (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009; Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011). These reasons might explain why social networking sites are being rapidly integrated to people's daily lives (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008). Similarly, educational uses of SNSs (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011; Green & Bailey, 2010; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman & Witty, 2010; Teclehaimanot & Hickman, 2011) and individual differences in using SNSs (Carpenter, Green & LaFlam, 2011; Ross & al., 2009) are currently popular subjects in research. Although these areas of inquiry are all important and worthy of exploration, a significant question has been largely ignored. Why do some university students deliberately not use SNSs? One study by Baker and White (2011), which examined the reasons offered by 9-10 year-old students at an Australian secondary school for their non-use of SNSs, reported that the primary reasons were lack of motivation, that it was a poor use of time, and that the students preferred other forms of communication. Secondary reasons were limited access, parental concerns, and the influence of friends. This study will examine the reasons for non-use of SNSs (specifically Facebook) among high-tech university students, and their attitudes about SNS usage. To provide a specific methodological contribution, this study will focus on identifying variations in the reasons that high-tech students provide for not using Facebook. The study will be useful to different groups, including schools, governments, parents, corporations, and webmasters (Baker & White, 2011). With the increasing number of SNSs, many academicians are now considering their use as an effective way to reach students (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010). Thus, this study will be helpful to those who want to develop educational tools to employ in SNSs. The research questions examined were:

- 1) What are the underlying reasons for the non-use of Facebook among high-tech university students?
- 2) What are the non-user high-tech university students' perceptions about the use of SNSs more generally?
- 3) What are the non-user high-tech university students' perceptions about online friendships and sharing ideas in virtual environments?

2. Methods

2.1. Overview

This is a descriptive case study, which focuses on why high-tech university students do not use social networking sites, even though they have access to the Internet and related technologies. A qualitative method was used during the data collection, to obtain in-depth information. The study focused on twenty university students, who were all deliberate non-users of Facebook.

2.2. Participants

The data were collected from 20 undergraduate students from Computer Education and Instructional Technology (CEIT) departments in two different universities in Turkey. One of the universities is in eastern Turkey, and the other is in north-eastern Turkey. All of the students participated in the research voluntarily and received a CD-Pen for their participation. The participants were selected by the purposive sampling method, which is widespread in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). As table 1 shows, this study group was aged 18 to 25, and consisted of 11 female and 9 male students.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of gender by universities

Universities			
Gender	U1	U2	Total (N)
Male	5	4	9
Female	7	4	11
Total	12	8	20

2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews, using a method developed by the researchers. In order to ensure the validity of the data collection tool, two expert reviews and four peer reviews were consulted. According to their feedback, the interview schedule was modified and finalized. The interviews typically lasted 15-20 minutes and were conducted by the one of the researchers.

2.4. Data analyses

The interviews were transcribed and coded. Then, the transcriptions were analyzed by means of content analysis. Initially, the researchers conducted an analysis of single transcriptions to create a set of categories and subcategories related to the research questions. Themes derived from each participant's responses were shared and discussed among the researchers.

3. Results

3.1. The underlying reasons stated by non-users of Facebook

None of the participants (n=20) were using Facebook during the data collection. The students were asked which factors caused them to be non-users of this SNS. The findings are presented in table 2. The participants were coded as P-numbers (P1, P2... P20). The frequency distribution of responses to this question is also presented in table 2.

Table 2: The underlying reasons stated by the non-users of Facebook

Themes	Frequency distribution of themes				Total (N)
	Female (N)		Male (N)		
	Previous user	Always a non-user	Previous user	Always a non-user	
Excessive time spent online	4	2	5	1	12
Lack of interest	4	5	1	0	10
Preference for other communication tools	1	5	0	0	6
Addiction	1	1	1	1	4
Dislike of self-presentation	1	0	3	0	4
Deviation from purposes of SNS	1	1	1	0	3
Being unsociable	1	1	0	0	2
Fear of academic failure	1	0	1	0	2
Prejudiced about the use of SNSs	0	1	0	1	2
Privacy concerns	0	0	1	0	1
Parents' concerns	1	0	0	0	1
Preference for using other SNSs	0	0	0	1	1
Friends' influence	0	1	0	0	1
Cyber-bullying	1	0	0	0	1

Spending excessive time on Facebook was the most common factor which kept the students from using the site (n=12; 6 females, 6 males). They stated that the use of Facebook was too time-consuming and distracting. Examples of the responses included, «Firstly, time is very important for me, and I don't want to lose it» (P1, Female). «I conclude that, too much of my time passes on Facebook, so I have suspended my account» (P6, Male).

The second-most reported reason for their non-use was «Lack of interest» (n=10; 9 females, 1 male). Some students stated that they had no interest or motivation to use Facebook, and they thought it was meaningless and unnecessary. For example, one student said, «I see Facebook as an unnecessary tool. I think I can do whatever I might want to do on Facebook anywhere else» (P13, Female).

Six students (n=6; 6 females) said that if they want to communicate with other people, there are a lot of other tools with similar applications, such as MSN messenger, which allow calling and messaging via a mobile phone. In short, they prefer other communication tools for communicating with people. One student reported, «I am using a mobile phone for speaking and short messages for contacting» (P8, Female). Similarly, another student reported, «Obviously, I don't need to use SNSs. I can contact people with whom I want to communicate by mobile phone. Frankly, I have never felt a need to use Facebook» (P19, Female).

One of the reasons for not using Facebook is the addiction factor. Some students (n=4; 2 females, 2 males) were afraid of developing a SNS addiction. For example, one student said, «I got a Facebook account for playing games. My intent was only to play a game, Poker. I was playing Poker, and later I became a Poker addict» (P14, Male).

The non-user students also did not like the idea of self-presentation on this site. One reported, «Since I believed I shared too much of my private life, I suspended my account» (P12, Male). Another complained that, «Eventually, people do not en-

gage in beneficial activities for society. Everyone is sharing their private lives, and I am not interested in their lives. Since I don't want to present myself, I don't find it necessary» (P4, Female).

Some students (n=3, 2 female, 1 male) reported that they started to use Facebook to contact and communicate with people, but later this purpose changed to a useless time-consuming activity. One student said, «I stopped using Facebook, because I noticed that I used it outside of my intentions. In my opinion, the purpose of Facebook is to keep in touch with people that are far away. I realized that on Facebook I was talking nonsense with people who are sitting next to my computer» (P7, Female). Similarly, another student said, «I think Facebook started as a good site, but later it developed very bad points. For example: Originally, it was put forward as a social network, but afterwards, games appeared. How should I know? Hundreds of comments were made on many of the articles. So I decided not to use Facebook» (P3, Male).

Another reason for not using this SNS was being unsociable (n=2, 2 females). One of the female students reported, «I don't think I will use Facebook again, because it decreases the quality of my communication with my friends» (P7, Female).

Academic failure was stated as another reason for not using Facebook. Two of the students remarked that they failed their exams when they used Facebook. One student reported, «Last year I had final exams, and I played Facebook games until morning. I went to my exams with two hours of sleep, and I regretted that very much. Since then I have not been using Facebook» (P14, Male). One female student also reported that she liked to use Facebook, but was scared of experiencing failures. She said, «I was afraid to use my Facebook account during my courses» (P10, Female).

Two of the students expressed that they had a prejudice against SNSs, due to encountering unpleasant experiences on Facebook or another SNS. They said that, if they were to use an SNS again, they might have the same unpleasant experiences. One female student had such an experience on MSN. She reported, «Use of MSN changed all of my habits. Particularly, it affected my grades in school when I was fifteen years old. After eliminating it, I cut completely off from the computer» (P9, Female). One student also reported that he already had a game addiction, and Facebook games could create another avenue for that addiction. He said, «I think that Facebook distracts me a lot, because I am addicted to games, and it has lots of games» (P16, Male).

One male student said that SNSs threatened his security and the confidentiality of his personal information. When one of the participants was asked why he thinks that his confidentiality was at risk on Facebook, he answered, «I didn't experience any unpleasant event, I just heard them from the news... So I have suspended my account» (P11, Male).

One of the female students expressed that her family prohibited her use of Facebook. She wanted to use SNSs, but her family's prohibition prevented her. She said, «My parents reacted and asked me to shut down my account. I want to reactivate it, but my parents will not allow me to do that now» (P10, Female).

The three least commonly reported reasons for not using Facebook were preference for using other SNSs, friends' influence, and cyber-bullying. One student

stated, «The reason for deactivating my Facebook account is tending to use Twitter more than Facebook» (P6, Male). Another student said, «I suspended my account, because nonsense messages are coming consistently. I felt depressed. I am very comfortable right now» (P8, Female).

3.2. Perceptions of the non-users about the use of SNSs generally

The students were asked what they think about the use of SNSs. The majority of the participants (n=14) reported that they use MSN messenger. Additionally, five of them reported that Twitter is better than Facebook, because Twitter doesn't have many tools as like Facebook which makes it easier to use. Five reported that they use Formspring, which «asks people original questions in anticipation of their entertaining or revealing responses...» (Formspring.me, 2012). But six students reported that they do not use any SNS. Two of these reported that they only use e-mail. Only one female student said that Facebook is the best among the SNSs. She stated, «Facebook is the best among the social networking sites. Twitter... No... I don't have an account on it. But most of my friends use it. But I don't know. I think it is very senseless. They only share words. Facebook is much more beautiful than other SNSs» (P2, Female).

3.3. Students' thoughts on virtual friendships

Table 3 presents a frequency distribution of the students' thoughts about virtual friendships. The themes which emerged were Dangerous, Fake, Meaningless, and Partial safety. A majority of the participants (n=17) reported that they do not believe in or rely on virtual friendships, and they think virtual friendships are dangerous. One student reported, «I think virtual friendships aren't a real friendship. Because you can easily send a friendship request. Obviously I don't endorse virtual friendships» (P11, Male). Another student said, «I think, if I talking with a friend who was known before in real life, it is a communication. But some people build friendships in virtual environments with people who aren't known in real life. Who is she/he? How old is she/he? You never know whether she/he is real person. I think, it is an environment which is extremely unsafe and open to lots of dangers» (P15, Female).

Eleven of the students said that virtual friendships are fake. For example, one student stated, «It is not suitable for me. I think too many things in there are incorrect» (P2, Female). Another student said, «It is normal, if people knew each other before. But I didn't find any suitable other friendships. Most of users' alleged friendships are fake...» (P14, Male).

Four participants reported that virtual friendships are nonsense and meaningless. For example, one student stated, «Virtual friendships are nonsense. When you don't know people who are around you, the effort to know people who are in the virtual world is very abnormal» (P18, Female).

Table 3: The opinions of non-users on virtual friendships

Frequency distribution of themes					
Themes	Female (N)		Male (N)		Total (N)
	Previous user	Always a non-user	Previous user	Always a non-user	
Dangerous	5	4	7	1	17
Fake	4	3	4	0	11
Meaningless	2	2	0	0	4

3.4. The students' thoughts on sharing ideas in virtual environments

The two most popular student responses regarding their thoughts on sharing ideas, personal information, and photographs were negative concerning «photo sharing» (n=8) and positive concerning «personal information sharing» (n=8). Other commonly reported opinions were negative concerning «sharing political views» (n=7), and that the site either «reflects [their] partially real personality» (n=8) or it «reflects [their] real personality» (n=3). The frequency distribution of the responses to this question is presented in table 4. One student said, «I think photograph sharing is a normal situation... But political opinions shouldn't be discussed on this site» (P16, Male). Conversely, another student said, «I don't see any problem sharing political thoughts, but sharing personal information can injure other people» (P7, Female).

Table 4: Opinions on sharing ideas in virtual environments

Frequency distribution of themes					
Themes	Female (N)		Male (N)		Total (N)
	Previous user	Always a non-user	Previous user	Always a non-user	
Photograph sharing negative	3	3	2	0	8
Personal information sharing positive	1	3	3	1	8
Photograph sharing positive	1	2	2	1	6
Personal information sharing negative	3	1	2	0	6
Political views sharing positive	2	1	2	0	5
Political views sharing negative	1	2	3	1	7
Reflecting partially real personality	1	4	2	1	8
Reflecting unreal personality	0	2	5	0	7
Reflecting real personality	3	0	0	0	3

3.5. Underlying factors that encourage SNS use

When asked to predict what factors encourage people to use an SNS, the two most popular responses were «Spending time» (n=10) and «Communication» (n=10). The frequency distribution of responses to this question is presented in

table 5. One student reported, «I think Facebook users use [the site] to increase enjoyable time with friends and to have a good time in their free time» (P16, Male). Another student said, «Curiosity and entertainment... I think they use [the site] for them» (P13, Female).

Table 5: Underlying factors that encourage SNS use

Themes	Frequency distribution of themes				Total (N)
	Female (N)		Male (N)		
	Previous user	Always a non-user	Previous user	Always a non-user	
Spending time	3	2	4	1	10
Communication	4	2	4	0	10
Loneliness	2	2	1	0	5
Entertainment	0	2	3	0	5
Game	0	1	3	0	4
Education	1	1	1	0	3
Meeting new people	1	0	2	0	3
Curiosity	1	1	1	0	3
Watching videos	0	0	2	0	2
Information sharing	1	1	0	0	2
Drawing attention	0	1	0	0	1
Flirting	0	0	1	0	1
Popular culture	2	0	0	0	2
Relaxing	1	0	0	0	1

3.6. The underlying reasons for SNS invitations

When asked to predict why people invite students to use Facebook, the two most popular responses were «to keep in touch with friends (n=12)» and «information sharing (n=6)». Table 6 shows the frequency distribution of invitation reasons.

Table 6: The underlying reasons for SNS invitations

Themes	Frequency distribution of themes				Total (N)
	Female (N)		Male (N)		
	Previous user	Always a non-user	Previous user	Always a non-user	
Keeping in touch with friends	3	4	1	1	9
Information sharing	3	2	1	0	6
Feeling alone	0	0	1	0	2
Playing game	0	1	0	0	1
Sharing funny elements	0	0	1	0	1

4. Conclusion and discussion

This study investigated the underlying reasons that explain why high-tech university students chose not to use Facebook, as an example of a social networking site, and analyses are presented regarding the non-users' perceptions about SNSs generally. Although high-tech students use the Internet frequently, the main findings indicate that the top reason for non-use of Facebook was excessive time spent online. This may be because students are very busy with their academic/professional development, and so have little time to engage in an online SNS (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Alternatively, online social networking may not be a priority for students (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Similarly, in the study that examined the reasons for non-use of SNSs among Australian secondary school students (n=69), Baker and White (2011) found that students also considered SNS use to be too-time consuming and distracting.

Lack of interest was also one of the prominent reasons for the non-use of Facebook. This is likewise similar to the perspective proposed by both Baker and White (2011) and Tufekci (2008), that non-users are less interested in the activities on SNSs, which can be conceptualized as social grooming. Despite the popularity of SNSs all over the world, these findings indicate dilemmas regarding the use of SNSs for a certain subset of people. Because the non-users are neither socially isolated nor fearful of Internet (Tufekci, 2008), we might instead surmise that this technology failed to capture the curiosity and attention of these students.

The results further indicate that the students in this study prefer other communication tools. Some even stated that SNSs are not good communication tools. This finding is consistent with the Baker and White's (2011) study, which found that students prefer other forms of communication, like the telephone, e-mail, and MSN, to SNSs. While these are the resulting reasons for non-use of Facebook in this case, other studies have described the same factors as the purpose of using SNSs. Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2011), Roblyer & al. (2010), and Bosch (2009) all reported that students use SNSs for communicating with people and friends, for making new friends, and for maintaining relationships. This difference could be related the fact that certain students encounter problematic events, such as cyber-bullying, or are affected by bad news about SNSs in the media. Another interesting item which the students reported was that they did not use Facebook, because they have several concerns about online self-presentation, such as photographs and sharing political views. Tufekci (2008) also reported that non-users disliked self-presentation on these websites. In contrast to the literature, this reason was usually reported by male students in this study. Conversely, Mazman and Usluel (2011) found that females tended to hide their identities and personal information to keep their privacy in the Internet environment.

These students were also afraid of becoming an Internet addict if they used Facebook, and they believed that Facebook had moved away from its original main purpose. Other than keeping in touch with friends or establishing friendships on Facebook, the participants notified that they would spend too much time with playing games on Facebook or using other Facebook applications (Joinson, 2008;

Pempek & al., 2009; Sheldon, 2008a; Stern & Taylor, 2007). In particular, this study also found that the non-user students believe Facebook usage is damaging to their social skills, especially to their relationships with their friends. In line with this finding, Rosen (2011) reported that people who use Facebook frequently show more narcissistic tendencies and higher than average signs of other psychological disorders, including antisocial behaviors, mania, and aggressive tendencies.

Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) pointed at the significant distinction between the academic achievement of users and non-users, and reported that users' GPAs were lower than those of the non-users. Karpinski & Duberstein (2009) also reported a negative relationship between Facebook use and academic achievement. Similarly, in this study, the findings showed that some students feared academic failure if they used Facebook. Therefore, if the educators want to integrate Facebook into their instructional activities, they should overcome their students' concerns initially.

Among the reasons for non-use of Facebook, prejudice against the use of SNSs generally or preference for using other SNSs, concerns about privacy and parents, friends' influence, and cyber-bullying were reported less often by these students. Baker and White (2011) suggested that parents' concerns and friends' influence are less declared than other reasons, and concluded that personal rather than socially-based reasons were more influential in the decision not to use SNSs. Privacy concerns and cyber-bullying may lead to the perception that SNSs are dangerous environments. These findings must be considered, perhaps especially by academics, to better understand university students, so as to develop more appropriate materials and environments for them.

The majority of these students believed that virtual friendships are either dangerous or fake. Further, they sometimes stated that virtual friendships are meaningless and only partially safe. Similarly, Tufekci (2008) found that non-users generally think that keeping in touch with existing friends on SNSs is nonsensical and meaningless. Researchers have found that some teens prefer interacting directly through the telephone or with face-to-face encounters rather than by online communication (McCown, Fischer, Page, & Homant, 2001; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2002). This is important when considering uses of SNSs for making new friends and expanding one's social environment. Therefore, it can be concluded that, for these students, SNSs are not only an unimportant resource for friendships, but also a meaningless and dangerous medium for such interactions. When the non-user students offered possible factors that encourage people to use SNSs, the top suggestions were spending time and communication with others. Similarly, many studies have concluded that people use social networking sites mostly to stay in touch with friends or to make new friends (Joinson, 2008; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006; 2008; Lenhart, 2009; Lewis & West, 2009; Pempek & al., 2009; Sheldon, 2008a; Stern & Taylor, 2007; Young & Quan-Haase, 2009). This finding revealed that the non-user students perceived SNSs as social environments, but interestingly, they chose not to rely on virtual friendships or on Facebook for communicating with people. Loneliness, entertainment, games, education, and meeting new people were all middling popular responses. It can be

concluded that non-user students do not think that SNSs are a suitable educational environment.

In conclusion, this study presents a variety of reasons for the non-use of SNSs by a group of selected high-tech university students, and their perceptions about the use of SNSs generally. The main reasons for their non-use of SNSs are «excessive time spent online», «lack of interest», «preference for other communication tools», «fear of addiction», and «dislike of self-presentation». Additionally, non-users think virtual friendships are unreliable and dangerous. And, they have several anxieties about Facebook. Therefore, these disadvantages must be considered by designers and developers of SNSs in order to reach a wider user group. Application developers and website developers should pay attention to saving time, and should develop more reliable systems to address cyber-safety concerns and to minimize cyber-bullying problems. Educational institutions, academics, and teachers should also pay attention to these student-expressed reasons for their non-use of SNSs. Non-user students' concerns must not be ignored when educational systems are developed for use in SNSs.

Limitations of current study include small sample of students examined and being a qualitative study. Qualitative studies often investigate the research problem in-depth. Therefore, small samples (less than 20) facilitate the researcher's job that to establish close contact with the participants (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Also considering the small number of nonusers of social networking, this should be no problem. Thus, the results may not be generalizable to students at other universities or all people. Based on these findings, future research should investigate the reasons for non-use of SNSs with the different samples and age groups.

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