



What social media sites do college students use most?

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Abstract College students rely on the Internet generally and social media sites specifically to connect with others. This study seeks to determine what social media sites college students use most. Students (N=363) completed a survey which assessed personal use of social media. Surveys were distributed face-to-face and online. Overall, Instagram was the most used social networking site followed by Snapchat and Facebook. The least used social networking sites were LinkedIn and Pinterest. Most (76%) use social networking sites 1-10 hours each day and a slightly larger proportion (80%) indicated they use the sites more on the weekend. Students are most likely to use social networking sites that enable them to post pictures and videos. They are least likely to use social networking sites that enable them to develop a professional network or post media content into organized categories. Social media sites are increasingly tailored to meet the needs of specific target markets. Understanding this evolutionary pattern is the key that unlocks which social media platforms college students will continue to use most.

Index Terms— social media, use, college, student

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is evolving at a rapid pace. According to internetworldstats.com the number of Internet users has grown by more than 30 million from 1995 until 2014. Users are relying on social media now more than ever. Since the creation of social media networks, the Internet has become the most popular tool for teens and young adults. Social media usage is particularly high among young adults and college students because students embrace new media quickly (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Most students use social media to create a personal profile, post what they are doing throughout their day, upload pictures,

and send messages to their friends and family. Social media are also used to develop a professional network to establish and strengthen relationships in the business world.

Literature Review

Social networking sites have become the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a network with a public or private profile and interact with people in that network (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social media can include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text), sharing tools, networking platforms, and virtual worlds (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social media sites fulfill many wants and needs via virtual communication. It is a

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convenient method of communication which provides the ability to stay connected with friends and family at the discretion of the users' own rate and time (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009). Social media are highly efficient because they are one of many methods of communication that allow users to quickly and widely disseminate information. According to Duggan and Brenner (2012), 83% of 18-29 year olds disseminate information via social networking sites.

Social media are increasing student engagement outside of the classroom and they are creating new and innovative ways to learn (see Ivala & Gachago, 2012; Bynum, 2011). Student engagement represents the time and effort students invest in their education. DeBell & Chapman (2006) pointed out that adolescent and young adults are the heaviest users of computers and the Internet. The average college student spends eight hours a day online (Kuh, 2001). However, college students have concerns about their Internet usage and balancing social life, extracurricular activities, and even part time jobs. In particular, "70% reported that they stay online longer than they intend. This suggests that the ubiquity of and ease of access to the Internet are not without a potential downside" (Christakis, Moreno, Jelenchick, Myaing, & Zhou, 2011, n.p.). Students view social media as a way to release pressure from school assignments (Wang, Chen & Liang, 2011). However, a balance between social media use and academic effort is imperative to improve student grades (Brydolf, 2007; Capano, Deris, & Desjardin, 2014; Junco, Helbergert, & Loken, 2011).

Social networking sites

Facebook. The most popular social networking sites to date are Facebook (Rainie, Smith, & Duggan, 2013), followed by Twitter (Brenner & Smith, 2013) and LinkedIn (Duggan & Brenner, 2012). Facebook allows users to set up a profile and post updates, links, photos, conversations, and the like. Sponcil & Gitimu (2007) reported that 88.5% recognized Facebook as their preferred social media site (p. 7). Wang, Chen, and Liang (2011) reported that students spend roughly 100 minutes per day on Facebook. In 2007, 92% of college students reported that they had a Facebook account. By 2008, 99% of students had an account on Facebook (p. 5). Williams and Merten (2008) found that university students are often obsessed with their Facebook and Twitter profile. A study by Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) showed that students spend an average of 28 minutes a day on Facebook (p. 231). Student researchers from the Whitmore School of Economics and Business found that younger students tend to use Facebook more frequently than older students to

keep in touch with friends from high school or from their hometown (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Many individuals use social network sites to feel popular, trying to add as many "friends" as possible so they appear to be more admired. Young adults reported an average of 358 Facebook friends (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009, p. 236). Quan-Haase and Young (2010) found that 82% of college students reported logging into Facebook several times a day.

Twitter. Twitter allows users to send out short messages or "tweets" about what they are doing or links to resources of interest. People can choose to "follow" selected users' tweets and they can retweet or repost someone's tweet for others to see. It is an online version of text-messaging with the capability of sending the same message to several thousand people all at once (Ezumah, 2013).

LinkedIn. LinkedIn is targeted at professionals interested in professional networking. Each user sets up a profile similar to a resume and then can link to other people that they know. Having been created in 2003, LinkedIn is one of the oldest social networks. However, this particular site is relatively new to younger generations.

Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are being joined by a complete new line of competitors in the social media business. The social network platforms Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube have become the new gateway for the expression for today's college generation.

Snapchat. Snapchat is an application for iPhones, iPads and Android devices. It allows subscribers to send to other subscribers photos that expire in one to ten seconds. There are an estimated 100 million daily active users of Snapchat, about 70% of whom are women (Smith, 2015, p.1). Wagner (2014) found that more than 77% of college students use Snapchat at least once per day. The most popular Snapchat use was for creativity (73%) followed by keeping in touch (27%). About one-fourth of the college student respondents (23%) reported that Snapchat is easier to use than texting (n.p.).

Instagram. Instagram is an application that allows users to take pictures and videos and share them on a variety of social networking platforms. It is owned by Facebook.

Pinterest. Pinterest is a personalized media platform which allows registered users to "pin" and organize media content into collections called pinboards. Users can also browse the content of others in their feed.

YouTube. Youtube is a video sharing website. It is owned by Google. Unregistered users can watch videos and registered users can upload videos.

Most used social networks



An infographic showing a user activity comparison of popular social networking sites posted online May 2, 2012 by Go-Gulf, showed Facebook as the most used social network with 901 million users (n.p.). This is followed by Twitter (555 million), Google+ (170 million), LinkedIn (150 million), and Pinterest (11.7 million). In terms of unique monthly visitors, Facebook had more than 16 times the number of visitors of the other social networking sites combined. Pinterest had more unique monthly visitors (104.4 million) than did LinkedIn (85.7 million) and Google+ (61 million). The Pew Research Center's 2014 Internet Project survey of 1,445 Internet users found that Blacks tend to use Facebook most (73%) followed by Instagram (34%), Twitter (25%), Pinterest (21%), and LinkedIn (18%) (Krogstad, 2015, n.p.). The American Press Institute's 2015 online article, "How millennials use and control social media," found that most (88%) get their news from Facebook followed by YouTube (83%) and Instagram (50%). About a third (36%) get their news from Pinterest and Twitter (33%) (para. 7). A 2014 social media comparison infographic by Leverage New Age Media (See Figure 1) shows that Facebook remains the clear leader among social networks with more than one billion active users. LinkedIn ranks second with 300 million users most (79%) of whom are 35 or older. Twitter and Instagram rank third and fourth with 241 million and 200 million users respectively. Pinterest has one-tenth the number of users that Instagram has and most of them (83%) are female (n.p.).

Of the social media platforms listed in the figure below, only Google+ was not included in the analysis. Initial discussions with students and early pilot-tests of the survey instrument suggested that the students being surveyed for this study do not use Google+ as a social media platform. Google+ is used primarily by an older population for business purposes.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedures

Surveys (N=363) were distributed to undergraduate students at a public co-educational university in the southeastern U.S. spring term 2015. Surveys were distributed on campus (n=236) in classrooms and common areas, and online via Survey Monkey (n=127). Most of the

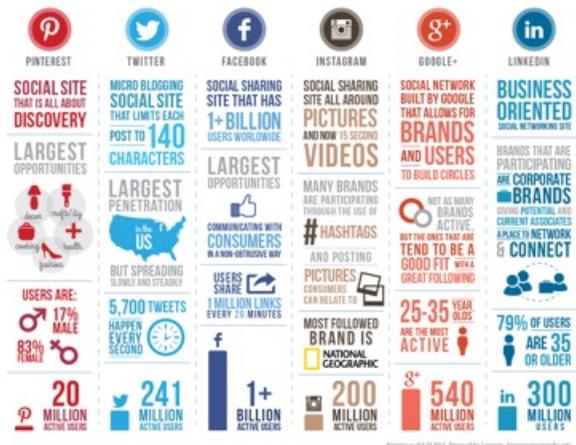


Figure 1. *Social Media Comparison Infographic. Leverage New Age Media. Retrieved August 31, 2015 from <https://leverage-newagemedia.com/blog/social-media-infographic/>*

respondents (59%) were female and most (78%) were 19-23 years old. Freshmen comprised 14% of the sample, 29% were sophomores, 32% juniors, and 25% seniors. Respondents were asked to choose their *most* preferred social media platform. It is reasonable to assume that many, if not most, of the respondents use several of the social media platforms listed.

Materials

The survey consisted of eight questions which asked about students' personal social media experiences. The first four questions were demographic questions – gender, age, race and year in school. The fifth question asked them to identify their most used social media network. Response options included Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. The final two questions asked the average amount of hours spent on any social media network per day and whether or not they used social media networks more during the weekend.

RESULTS

Overall, Instagram was the most used social networking site (29%) followed by Snapchat (24%) and Facebook (23%) (see Table 1). The least used social networking sites were LinkedIn and Pinterest (2% each).



Table 1. Demographic and Summary Information

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Use social media?</i>	
Male	59	Yes	97
Female	41	No	3
<i>Age</i>		<i>Most preferred social media</i>	
19-23	78	Instagram	29
24+	22	Snapchat	24
<i>Year in school</i>		Facebook	23
Freshman	14	Twitter	13
Sophomore	29	YouTube	7
Junior	32	LinkedIn	2
Senior	25	Pinterest	2
<i>Race</i>		<i>Hours per day on social media</i>	
Black	69	1-5	46
White	13	6-10	29
Asian	5	11-15	12
Hispanic	6	16-20	7
Other	7	>20	6
All numbers are percents.		<i>Use social media more on weekends?</i>	
		Yes	80
		No	20
		All numbers are percents.	

Table 2. Gender Differences

<i>Most preferred social media</i>	<i>Hours per day on social media</i>		<i>Use social media more on weekend?</i>			
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
Instagram	30	29	1-5	38	54	
Snapchat	25	23	6-10	36	24	
Facebook	18	27	11-15	13	11	
Twitter	16	10	16-20	5	8	
YouTube	7	7	>20	8	3	
LinkedIn	2	2	All numbers are percents.			
Pinterest	2	2				
All numbers are percents.						

Most (76%) use social networking sites 1-10 hours each day and a slightly larger proportion (80%) indicated they use the sites more on the weekend. There is a slight gender difference in social network use. Instagram and Snapchat are the top two social networking sites for both males and females (see Table 2). However, about the same proportion of females use Facebook and Twitter (18% and 16% respectively).

Almost three times as many males use Facebook (27%) as they do Twitter (10%). About the same proportion of males and females spend between one and ten hours per day on social networking sites (males = 77%, females = 74%). However, about the same proportion of females use social networking sites 1-5 hours (38%) as they do 6-10 hours (36%). Far more males use these sites only 1-5 hours (53%) each day than they do 6-10 hours (24%). In short, females access social networking sites more hours each day than do males.

DISCUSSION

Students are most likely to use social networking sites that enable them to post pictures and videos. They are least likely to use social networking sites that enable them to develop a professional network or post media content into organized categories. College students use these networks 1-5 hours each day and more on weekends.

This information is important because it can be used for future innovation. They have the blueprint from previous networking sites. From those they can create what they believe would be the next best thing in social media. It is also beneficial for marketing and advertising companies who have the ability to use these sites to market their products and services. For example, Snapchat has a new feature where they have a “Discover” page where

companies such as CNN, Cosmopolitan, Food Network, National Geographic, and other big names market their products, shows, events, etc. Who and when these companies are accessed in this way could be used when attempting to segment an audience. For example, if a major magazine company wanted to market some of their products to a college campus via social media, they may find that their target market is African American females age 19 to 23. It could also be used as a teaching device, especially for communication majors. Utilizing these new forms of social media in college classes could also encourage participation from students who might otherwise be distracted and not engaged in classroom activity. They have the potential to increase interaction between faculty and students, and among students thereby increasing networking opportunities and the development of interpersonal relationships.



CONCLUSION

Social networks are both pervasive and powerful. They are an effective means of connection, one that college students use extensively. What seems to be happening to social media sites is what has happened to every form of media that has preceded – specialization. Social media sites are increasingly tailored to meet the needs of specific target markets. This evolutionary pattern suggests the future of social media sites. Understanding the pattern is the key that unlocks which social media platforms college students will continue to use most.

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