Gender Differences in Facebook usage among EFL students

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Abstract

Facebook is a social networking website which has become the most popular among others, with over 1 billion active users. Along with economic globalization and the rapid growth in international contacts, this growing communicative technology has become an inevitable part in all spheres of our daily life. It is not only a tool that allows us to transfer information at an astonishing speed and provide instant communication but also an agent potentially to change the flow of lives. In spite of a number of studies on people's attitude towards social networks and online applications, there is little interest in gender use in this matter. There are even contradictory reports favoring males and females in the use of information technology and social media. This paper seeks to answer whether there is any significant difference between male and female university EFL students in the use of Facebook.

Key words: social network; gender; EFL students

Introduction

Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites with its 1.3 billion daily active users (Facebook, 2016, on average for June 2016). Its wide variety of functions such as communicating, sharing information, socialising, and keeping up with the pace of the world and so forth add to its popularity in the world). The widespread use of Internet technologies including e-mails, discussion forums, chat, video conferencing, smart phones and tablet PCs also oiled the wheel of this popularity.

At the very beginning the use of Facebook was very much limited to interpersonal communication and hedonic purposes. It has now far-reaching consequences in every sphere of life from economy to education. Facebook can provide four types of support; individual, social (emotional, affectionate informational, positive interaction), educational and professional. Informational support involves offering guidance, advice, information, or feedback that can provide a solution to a problem. Empathetic understanding and encouraging expressions through Facebook provide emotional support. Facebook provides a convenient channel to quickly receive suggestions from friends. Affectionate support involves

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expressions of love and affection. Facebook provides several tools, such as its ''like'' and messaging functions, that can be used to show support and express emotions to friends. Social companionship involves spending time with others in leisure and recreational activities. Facebook seems to provide a safe and trusted online environment in which to share happy moments with friends. In other words, Facebook has provided a convenient channel for people to acquire informational, emotional, and even material assistance from online acquaintances, presenting itself as a platform where people can interact with each other for educational and professional purposes. People prefer social networking websites particularly Facebook because

- It is less tiring and time-consuming when compared to face-to-face interaction.
- People feel more relaxed and easy to express themselves via computers as it is less stressful.
- With a click it is easy to establish new friendships through computers. It is more enjoyable and convenient to do multiple things while communicating with their friends even synchronously
- Facebook involves many features of social networking websites.
- Videos, pictures, statements of any kind can be uploaded, and downloaded and watch postings feeling, status, statements of any kind.

It did not take long for Facebook to make quick inroads into education besides its hedonic uses as today's students are readily digital natives and are always interacting with this online world from a very early age. Educators and teachers have felt compelled either to adapt themselves to digital technology or to stay in tune with their customers. This also has given a great impetus to academic circles to move from a traditional teacher-centered approach in which the teacher seems to be the transmitter of knowledge to student-centered approach, where students are active participants and knowledge generators rather than those to absorb the given information.

The growing body of research Facebook seems to focus on a wide variety of topics and issues which can be summarized as Facebook (in)/as an educational tool, social and cultural communication, genuine instant/ authentic communication interaction, intercultural and intracultural awareness, active and interactive learning experiences such as peer, tutoring, self-directed learning, experiential and real-world-learning, problem-based learning and reflective teaching, connecting students into the learning process, academic achievement, verbal literacy and self-esteem, adaptation to different culture socialization and improving language learning (Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Munoz & Towner, 2009; Saltaş, 2015).

In spite of bright side of Facebook as briefly outlined above, there is also sharp criticism levelled against Facebook due to the problems and violations it has brought about such as, cyber bullying, stalking, identity crisis, feeling of resentment, jealousy, unhappiness, obsession with self-images, abusing humanity's inner weaknesses, online harassment, child safety, multilateral intrusions, privacy invasion, unearthly overloaded useless information and trivialities, fantasy-idealized world with pretentious posts and addiction (American Psychological Association, 2011; Harris, 2011, Saltaş, 2015). Furney (2016:1) views Facebook basically fake since people conceal behind a screen:

> The realities of life are far too mundane to allow reality a peek in, on Facebook at least. That's why it's primarily fake and a fetish for users and followers and friends. … It's extreme exploitation, on a global scale, tapping into humanity's fundamental

weaknesses, even making a corporate and government fetish out of ourselves and our desires.

Years from now we will look back at this apparent "phenomenon" and laugh at the juvenile idiocy of it, our pretense at showcasing the best of us when we were never even being true to ourselves at all, but duped by the false oasis of a promised land that's not even a land but a created dystopia of wires and glass and whizzing electrons designed only to profit those who create them — and worse: with users as product. …How can anyone be social -- really engaging with fellow human beings, and all of the joy and satisfaction that entails -- while concealed behind a glass screen powered by whirring electronics, oceans of fibre optics and orbiting satellites?

Given the fact that Internet addiction is listed as a serious problem in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Tang, Chen, Yang, & Lee, 2016). Facebook addiction as a subtype of Internet addiction is likely to be treated within the category of behavioural addiction (Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg, &Pallesen, 2012). However, Dr. Conrad, Clinical Psychologist for TechAddiction, (2016) approaches this issue with some caution, due to the complexity in diagnosing the use of Facebook as addiction since Internet addiction is not an official psychiatric diagnosis. In spite of lack of agreed standards for what diagnoses Facebook addiction, the extant literature indicates symptoms of addiction when too much time spent on Facebook, interfering with functioning in other areas of life such as relationships, education, work, school, and emotional well-being.

In a recent study on examination of neural systems in relation to Facebook addiction by Turel, He, Xue, Xiaol, and Bechara (2014) Facebook-related addictions share some neural features with substance and gambling addictions. In other words, brain functions of 20 undergraduate subjects addicted to the Facebook were claimed to react in a similar way to those of people with cocaine and gambling addiction. The paper published in the journal Psychological Reports: Disability and Trauma indicates "individuals who present low-medium levels of addiction-like symptoms in relation to Facebook have an imbalance between their amygdala-striatal and prefrontal cortex systems" (2014, p. 13). This means that users might choose to respond to a Facebook message on their cell phone prior to reacting to traffic conditions while on the road. Blachnio, Przepiorka, and Pantic (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study to find out the association between Facebook addiction and self-esteem and life satisfaction. Similar to most of the studies in the recent related literature, they found that the Facebook addicts have low level of self-esteem and life satisfaction. In another recent study with a different focus, Tang et al., (2016) aimed at investigating the possible reasons for Facebook addiction among 792 college students from eight universities in Taiwan. They concluded that Facebook addiction is a complex phenomenon resulting from both personal and motivational factors. They also found a positive correlation between interpersonal relationship maintenance and Facebook addiction. Similarly, all types of social support were positively correlated with social media addiction. Regarding personality types, the found that neuroticism and conscientiousness are related to Facebook addiction. Most importantly, they found online interpersonal relations as the strong predictor of addiction.

Hong and Chiu (2016) conducted a study with 225 Taiwanese university students to find out the role of personal traits and motivation on Facebook usage and addiction. They found that a desire for online psychological privacy is associated with more Facebook use, and thus addictive tendency. According to a study by Krasova, Wenninger, Widjaja, and Buxmann (2013), one out of three people became unhappy with their lives, due to the feeling of resentment, jealousy and unhappiness that Facebook caused.

In another study with 370 university students on the possible relationship between Facebook addiction and social safeness and life satisfaction, Akın and Akın (2015) indicate that the participants who used Facebook much were found to have unhealthy social relations, and thus low social safeness. They cannot differentiate between the real and online world interaction. The findings also show a negative correlation between life satisfaction and Facebook addiction. Overuse or misuse of social networking hampers individuals' life and discourages them to participate in activities with which one can get increase their life satisfaction.

Given the fact that 890 million people log onto Facebook daily and average time spent per Facebook visit is 20 minutes, there is a dire need to further explore the use of Facebook among students with a focus on gender perspectives, which seems not to have received adequate attention.

Methodology

This is a survey study. A total of 354 English-prep students participated in the study, 213 of whom were male and 141 were female. Students come from Departments of Electrical engineering, Sea transport, Machine engineering, Public relations and advertising, International relations, Computer engineering, Medical School, Public administration, Mining engineering.

Facebook Addiction Test developed by Dr. Brent Conrad was used in order to see the difference, if any, between the male and female EFL students. There were 21 questions in the format of Yes/No. As stated earlier, Facebook addiction is not a formal clinical diagnosis, hence the questions in The Facebook Addiction Test and the symptoms are recommended to be used as a rough assessment of Facebook habits. While there is not a definite number that indicates "Facebook Addiction", the more there is agreement with the items, the more likely it is that Facebook habits are excessive or unhealthy. Dr. Conrad Clinical Psychologist for TechAddiction recommends the following assessment criteria not necessarily as a formal clinical diagnosis but as an indicator for people to describe themselves as being "obsessed", if not addicted.

- 0 - 5: You are most likely a light user of Facebook - you can take it or leave it and it probably does not cause any significant problems in your life.
- 6 - 10: Facebook is a part of your daily routine. At times you may spend too much time with it and may regret long Facebook sessions after you finally log off.
- 11 - 20: Your use of Facebook may be unhealthy or obsessive. Too much time on Facebook may be causing or contributing to "real life" problems and you may use it to avoid other important responsibilities.
- 21+: Your life revolves around Facebook. You would find it very difficult to go more than a day or two without checking your account. Your relationships and your school or work performance are probably suffering due to excessive Facebook use. You would greatly benefit from learning why Facebook is addictive, reducing your Facebook time, and learning about tips and advice for Facebook Addiction.

Data Analysis

Due to the nature of data, nonparametric tests (descriptive and inferential) were used so as to see whether there was any significant difference between the male and female students in terms of Facebook addiction.

Table 1. Having Facebook Account by Gender

Gender * Having Facebook Account Crosstabulation

			Having Facebook Account		
			no	yes	Total
Gender	Male	Count	30	183	213
		% within gender	14,1%	85,9%	100,0%
		% within havingfbaccount	56,6%	61,0%	60,3%
		% of Total	8,5%	51,8%	60,3%
	Female	Count	23	117	140
		% within gender	16,4%	83,6%	100,0%
		% within havingfbaccount	43,4%	39,0%	39,7%
		% of Total	6,5%	33,1%	39,7%
Total		Count	53	300	353
		% within gender	15,0%	85,0%	100,0%
		% within having fb account	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	15,0%	85,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	,364[a]	1	**,546**		
Continuity Correction[b]	,203	1	,652		
Likelihood Ratio	,361	1	,548		
Fisher's Exact Test				,547	,324
Linear-by-Linear Association	,363	1	,547		
N of Valid Cases[b]	353				

There was no a statistically significant association between gender and having Facebook account. In other words, having Facebook account was independent from gender (*p-value=.546>.05*).

Table 2. Time management for Facebook use by gender

		Male		Female		Chi-Square
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	
1. I often spend too much time on Facebook - usually more than I originally intend.	**Yes**	46	74,2	16	25,8	**,021**
	No	154	58,3	110	41,7	
3. My friends or family have commented that I spend too much time on Facebook.	**Yes**	19	79,2	5	20,8	,064
	No	182	60,1	121	39,9	
14. I have attempted to reduce the amount of time I spend on Facebook but have not been successful.	**Yes**	23	85,2	4	14,8	**,008**
	No	177	59,2	122	40,8	
15. I spend more time using Facebook compared to any other online activity	**Yes**	49	76,6	15	23,4	**,005**
	No	151	57,6	111	42,4	

According to Table 2, the male students were found to spend much more time on Facebook than the female, resulting statistically significant difference (p < .021). This finding was also confirmed by the responses given to the item 14 that the male students significantly differ from the female in their attempt to reduce the amount of time spend on Facebook (p < .008). As compared to other online activities, there is a statistically significant difference between the male and female students (p < .005).

Table 3. Negative effects of Facebook use

		Male		Female		Chi-Square
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	
2. I am often tired in the morning because I stay up late on Facebook.	**Yes**	17	70,8	7	29,2	,322
	No	183	60,6	119	39,4	
9. My school performance has suffered due to too much Facebook use.	**Yes**	15	100	-	-	**,002**
	No	185	59,5	126	40,5	
10. My relationships have suffered due to too much Facebook use.	**Yes**	18	81,8	4	18,2	**,041**
	No	182	59,9	122	40,1	
12. When I post an update on Facebook, I am very disappointed if no one comments on it.	**Yes**	15	57,7	11	42,3	,690
	No	185	61,7	115	38,3	
17. Since starting to use Facebook I spend less time doing other activities I used to enjoy (e.g., sports, exercise, socializing with others, hobbies, etc.).	**Yes**	25	89,3	3	10,7	**,001**
	No	175	58,7	123	41,3	
18. Even though I have many Facebook friends, I still feel lonely.	**Yes**	22	71	9	29	,248
	No	178	60,3	117	39,7	
23. I am often late for school, work, meetings, or appointments because of my Facebook use.	**Yes**	7	77,8	2	22,2	,301
	No	192	60,8	124	39,2	
24. I would get very upset if a friend did not "add" me to Facebook.	**Yes**	19	63,3	11	36,7	,782
	No	178	60,8	115	39,2	
26. It makes me feel bad if I know that someone has more Facebook friends than I do.	**Yes**	8	88,9	1	11,1	,084
	No	191	60,4	125	39,6	

Table 3 deals with the negative effects of Facebook use. The responses given to the items concerning the psychological mode of the students due to their Facebook use indicate no statistically significant difference between the groups. However, it is interesting to note that the males significantly differ from the females in that since starting to use Facebook the males spend less time doing other activities they used to enjoy (e.g., sports, exercise, socializing with others, hobbies, etc.) (p< .001). As comparative analysis carried out to examine the difference between the two groups of students in respect of feeling lonely despite

having many Facebook friends showed a remarkable difference as illustrated in item 18. More males comparatively felt lonely.

Table 4. Reasons for Facebook use by gender

		Male		Female		Chi-Square
		N	%	N	%	
4. I spend more than two hours per day on Facebook for non-work related reasons.	Yes	43	66,2	22	33,8	,374
	No	157	60,2	104	39,8	
11. I often spend hours at a time playing games on Facebook.	Yes	13	65	7	35	,729
	No	187	61,1	119	38,9	
16. I often use Facebook to avoid other responsibilities (e.g., work, homework, housework, etc.).	Yes	17	68	8	32	,477
	No	183	60,8	118	39,2	
22. I use Facebook when I am feeling stressed or depressed to make me feel better.	Yes	44	57,1	33	42,9	,413
	No	154	62,3	93	37,7	
29. I often use Facebook when I am bored because I have nothing else to do.	Yes	131	61,2	83	38,8	,994
	No	68	61,3	43	38,7	

As indicated in Table 4, there is no statistically significant difference, in terms of reasons for Facebook use, between the male and female students though the male students were found to use Facebook more for non-work related reasons and games. It is remarkable that both a great number of male and female students were observed to use Facebook when they are bored because they have nothing else to do. Comparatively more males were observed to spend hours at a time playing games on Facebook. Overall analysis indicates that both groups were found to use Facebook for games and other activities in moderation.

Table 5. Facebook addiction by gender

		Male		Female		Chi-Square
		N	%	N	%	
5. I often use Facebook at work or school even though this is not permitted.	Yes	34	70,8	14	29,2	,144
	No	166	59,7	112	40,3	
6. I would find it very difficult if I could not access my Facebook account for an entire day.	Yes	47	62,7	28	37,3	,790
	No	153	61	98	39	
20. Checking my Facebook account is one of the first things I do in the morning.	Yes	33	60	22	40	,837
	No	166	61,5	104	38,5	
21. Checking my Facebook account is one of the last things I do at night.	Yes	60	65,2	32	34,8	,448
	No	137	59,3	94	40,7	
25. I have set my Facebook account so that I get always automatic notifications about what my friends are doing / saying.	Yes	47	71,2	19	28,8	,059
	No	151	58,5	107	41,5	
27. I think it would be virtually impossible for me to give up Facebook for an entire month.	Yes	37	72,5	14	27,5	,071
	No	162	59,1	112	40,9	

Table 5 deals with the items concerning Facebook addiction. Although Facebook addiction has not been identified diagnostically, its preliminary symptoms seem to be agreed on. The statistical analysis of responses given to the six separate items (5, 6, 20, 21, 25, 27) shows that there is no significant difference between the male and the female students. It is, yet, important to note that the male students were found to be comparatively much more dependent on Facebook than the females. To illustrate this tendency, while 65.2 percent of the males were found to check their Facebook account before going to bed, this was 34.8 for females. Similarly, 72.5% of the males were observed to hold the view that it would be virtually impossible for them to give up Facebook for an entire month whereas this was 27.7 for the females. Sixty percent of the males and 40 % of the females were found to agree with

the item "*checking my Facebook account is one of the first things I do in the morning*" received 60.

Table 6. Social aspect of Facebook by gender

| | | Male | | Female | | Chi- |
		N	%	N	%	Square
7. I have made an effort to collect as many "friends" as possible on Facebook.	Yes	16	80	4	20	,077
	No	184	60,1	122	39,9	
8. Many of my Facebook friends are not really my friends offline.	Yes	25	71,4	10	28,6	,195
	No	175	60,1	116	39,9	
13. I usually prefer talking to people on Facebook than in person.	Yes	22	81,5	5	18,5	**,025**
	No	178	59,5	121	40,5	
19. I often login to Facebook when I am out socially with others.	Yes	30	73,2	11	26,8	,093
	No	169	59,5	115	40,5	
28. I often confuse what someone has told me "in real life" and what was said on Facebook.	Yes	27	62,8	16	37,2	,822
	No	172	61	110	39	

When it comes to social aspect of Facebook as indicated in Table 6, there is a statistically significant difference between the males and the females in that a very great number of male students (81.5 %) were reported to prefer talking to people on Facebook than in person (p<. 025). This was only 18.5% for the female students. Similar to this finding, a substantial number of the male students (80%) were observed to have made an effort to collect as many "friends" as possible on Facebook. It is quite interesting to note that 71.4% of the males were found to hold the view that *many of my Facebook friends are not really my friends offline*. This was 28.6% for the females.

Conclusions

Although the newly coined term "Facebook Addiction" has not been identified diagnostically, and psychometric tools including the one used in this study have an inherent weakness due to the complexity of the phenomena being investigated, the preliminary results obtained from this study indicate an unhealthy urge to spend an inordinate amount of time on Facebook among students. In view of the fact that 74,2% of the male students were observed to often spend too much time on Facebook - usually more than they originally intend (Table 2) along with other findings, there is a growing problem of Facebook use whether it is called obsession or addiction. The male students appear to be using Facebook in an addictive way, greater than the female ones. It may seem early to call this compulsion as addiction as there is no overall agreement on this issue. Given the accessibility and ease of Facebook use almost at any place and time, it is true to say that the number of students and the amount of time the students are to be engaged in Facebook activities will increase. Our findings indicate that Facebook goes beyond a means of communication or entertainment, interfering with the students' everyday life, providing further evidence for the existing body of research (Conrad, 2016; Tang et al, 2016; Akın & Akın 2015). This free time activity may in return become detrimental to their academic and school performance. It is not surprising for the author of this paper to observe some students keeping their Facebook open, switching between class and the page in every opportunity they take in class. They can easily get distracted in their tasks or activities as their attention is always diverted to Facebook notifications. According to noticing hypothesis, for instance, language learners need to direct their attention to some aspect of linguistic features consciously. Input does not become intake for language learning unless it is attended to. It is the attentional space and period that largely determine the course of language development. Facebook seems to be intervening with the quality of learning and

education to some extent. For a more comprehensive research, we need to integrate qualitative data into quantitative one by using more psychometrically validated tools to explore Facebook use as Facebook is now more than a social networking site.

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