

## **Pre-Service Teachers' Views about the Use of Social Networks**

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### **Abstract**

*The development and spread of Internet technologies made an important breakthrough in communication between people. Social networks are regarded as a virtual way of social life created by people via the Internet. With the help of these networks, individuals define themselves and communicate with other people from the same cultural background thanks to the opportunities provided by the Internet. It is important to reveal the rate of university students' use of social networks, which have the capability of guiding societies and their future. Determining which social networks pre-service teachers prefer and how often and why they use these social networks will help better-understand the concept of social network. This study was carried out with 566 pre-service teachers attending Ziya Gokalp Education Faculty at Dicle University. In the study, the descriptive relational survey model was used. As a result of analysis of the research data, it was found out that 73,50% of the students had social network accounts. It was also revealed that the students with a social network account established connection generally with their friends via their own accounts (59,1%). In addition, the Fisher Exact test revealed that the preservice teachers' social network use time depended on the number of their friends they communicated with via social network and that there were relationships between the individuals the preservice teachers communicated with and the duration of their being social network users and between the individuals they communicated with and the duration of their being social network users.*

**Keywords:**Internet, computer, social network, education



Inönü University  
Journal of the Faculty of Education  
Vol 18, No 3, 2017  
pp. 61-70  
DOI: 10.17679/inuefd.354210

Received : 29.12.2015  
Revision1 : 18.02.2017  
Revision2 : 21.04.2017  
Revision3 : 02.06.2017  
Accepted : 09.08.2017

### **Suggested Citation**

Yalman, M., Basaran, B. & Gonen, S. (2017). Pre-Service Teachers' Views about the Use of Social Networks, *Inonu University Journal of the Faculty of Education*, 18(3), 61-70. DOI: 10.17679/inuefd.354210

## INTRODUCTION

Social networks are regarded as a virtual social life created by people in the Internet environment. Among these networks, people define themselves and establish communication with other people from the same level of culture thanks to the opportunities provided by the Internet. Recent developments in Turkey have demonstrated that correspondences and comments made via social networks are likely to change views of a number of individuals about various subjects of phenomena (Et, 2008; Solmaz et. al., 2013).

The first network that fits the definition of social network was SixDegrees designed in 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). With the spread of the Internet, a substantial increase has been observed in the use of personal computers. In addition, there has been a rapid increase in the number of social networks, considered to be one other way for people to connect with each other via the Internet, as well as in the number of social network users since 2003 (Tiryakioğlu & Erzurum, 2011). With this new technology, which makes social communication open to new horizons, people started connecting with others without first knowing anything about them and introduced themselves to new cultures. The increase in the number of social network users has eventually caused a great potential (Levy, 2007; Karademir & Alper, 2011).

In studies conducted, it is seen that there are different definitions of social networks. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networks are web-based services which allow individuals to create a profile open or half-open to everyone in a limited system; which clearly provide the list of other users that individuals connected to; and which again provide the list of people that other users are connected to in the system. Tiryakioğlu and Erzurum (2011) define social networks as an online service, platform or area which allows establishing social communication and social relationships and which allows people to share their experiences. In general meaning, social networks could be said to be websites that provide individuals to interact with their families or friends via the Internet (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012).

The spread of these structures, a new way of technological communication, leads to the establishment of a number of platforms. Among the greatest advantages of these environments is that they allow people to meet each other independently of time and place via these social networks (Griffith & Liyanage, 2008). The gradually increasing number of social network users is another indicator that individuals adapt technology to their daily lives (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). Facebook could be said to be the most popular social network used in Turkey and in the world. Today, the number of Turkish users favoring Facebook as a social network is 26.198.200, which makes Turkey the top fourth country in the world preceded by USA, Indonesia and England (Tiryakioğlu & Erzurum, 2011). Turkish users who prefer Facebook to other social networks are ranked 4th among all users in the world following USA, Indonesia and England (26.198.200 Turkish users of Facebook) (Tiryakioğlu & Erzurum, 2011). Of all the Turkish users of Facebook, 36% of them are female, and 64% of them are male (July 2011: Source: Facebook Ads).

It is seen that today even high school students use the Internet especially for such purposes as searching for information about general issues and about their studies, playing games and chatting with others (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Yalman et.al., 2011). At the moment, Facebook has become one of the most popular social networks among university students (Wang et. al., 2012; Magogwe et. al., 2015). Social networks, regarded by many people initially as a tool for chatting and connecting with others, are now favored as an instructional material (Griffith & Liyanage, 2008; Awodele et.al., 2009). Social networks, which allow students or other trainers to cooperate while preparing contents intended to be developed for educational purposes (MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, Secondlife and so on), help establish better relationships with students and contribute to their learning process (Karataş, 2010; Pascu, 2008). Users can be encouraged to establish simultaneous communication with their friends directed towards, which will allow them to experience and enjoy it (Moghavvemi & Salarzadeh Janatabadi, 2017). It is believed that academicians, who think an educational environment should address all individuals, could certainly use social networks to enrich their learning and teaching experiences (Blackey & Chew 2009). Regarding the most important advantages of instructional use of these networks with their millions of users, it could be stated that these social networks are free of charge; that they are quite easy to use; that they allow using cooperative learning environments; that they provide students with learning environments independent of time and place; that they lead to more effective learning supported with multimedia content; that they result in active participation of timid students; that questions directed related to the subject are open to sharing; and that these social networks increase learning (Yalman, 2013; Basaran et al., 2016). As for the limitations

to the social networks, they require a computer; internet connection and social network account for each student and allow users to make unnecessary and undesirable comments (Kalafat & Göktaş, 2011).

Social networks are among the most important platforms where people spend enjoyable time together and share things with each other in virtual environments (Kobak & Biçer, 2008). Determining the purposes of use of social networks which allow individuals to become aware of a number of events in the world and in our country and to make related comments could contribute positively to their future lives. Determining preservice teachers' consciousness of social networks could fundamentally change their future students' viewpoints regarding this subject.

### **Literature Review**

The development of technology has resulted in new definitions related to human relations. With the help of social networks, people can share many things regarding several subjects by establishing communication with people whom they do not know and even with those whom they will never ever come together. It is seen that social network users, while determining which networks they will use, generally favor those their friends prefer and that they communicate with their friends via these networks. Today, there are a number of alternative social networks on the Internet. The present study basically focused on the overall features of popular social networks used throughout the world.

### **Social Network Websites and Their Features**

Facebook, one of the most favorite social networks used in Turkey and in the world, is a social network "which allows users to communicate with others via private messages or via messages open to everyone, to join groups and to share sources" (Gonzales, 2010). In this system, which was first used at Harvard University in 2004, users had to have an e-mail account of Harvard University to become a member of Facebook. In this way, unfamiliar people were prevented from creating an account on this network, and a more sincere and private environment was established. In 2005, when Facebook first appeared, it was designed to support different university networks. Thus, an e-mail account was no longer essential to become a member of the network. After September 2005, Facebook was made available to high school students, professionals and eventually to all people around the world. What makes Facebook different from other social networks is that it allows users to customize their own profiles (Griffith & Liyanage, 2008). Besides its numerous advantages, Facebook has certain deficiencies as well. According to users, these deficiencies include sharing of personal information, abuse of private pictures and use of certain advertisements and videos for the purpose of encouraging sexual abuse or drug abuse (Peluchette & Karl, 2010; Karademir & Alper, 2011). Hablemitoğlu and Yıldırım (2012), in their study on social networks and Facebook, reported that according to the statistical data regarding the use of Facebook in 2009, there were more than 202.727.740 Facebook users and that it was the most visited social network platform with 120 million visits a day. More than two-third of the members of the website are those out of a university, and the most rapidly increasing member group is the 35-year-old (and older) age group. On Facebook, a member has 120 friends at average, and a total duration of five billion minutes is spent in general in the world.

In Turkey, Twitter is the second mostly-used social network. Due to its gradually increasing number of users, this social network, which allows sharing one's own current state via the Internet, is used not only by individuals but also by various commercial and cultural organizations as a communication means (Karademir & Alper, 2011). Owing to this increase in the number of its registered users, the basic question directed initially in the opening screen as a welcoming message has changed recently. Users greeted in the past with the question of "What are you doing now?" in the message box found in the opening screen have been greeted since December in 2009 with the question "What's happening now?" (Genç, 2010).

In terms of the number of users, another social network with its millions of followers is YouTube. As a video storage and sharing website, YouTube was established in 2005 by three American workers of PayPal (Safe and Practical Online Payment Portal). In their study, Karademir & Alper (2011) determine the features of YouTube. In the education category of YouTube, the videos uploaded can be viewed as merely educational videos; the user channel can be customized; the videos related to the video being played can be viewed via the website interface; the video lists can be grouped in users' channels; wide range of statistical information about the videos uploaded by users can be viewed; a strong service is available to make comments regarding the videos being played; it provides users with freedom of action thanks to its feature of "Watch later"; and HD-quality videos can be uploaded and viewed. Another social network prominent

with its number of users is MySpace established by Tom Anderson and Chris DeWolfe in 2003. The website, first used for the purpose of storage of musical pieces as well as for marketing purposes, was sold to the company of InterMix in 2005 and transformed into a news website allowing advertisement (Rayn et. al., 2011). On MySpace users can chat with their friends, make new friends, contact with their families, share business-focused things both with their colleagues and with other corporate staff, follow and use the network to communicate with friends whom they have not seen for long (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

### **Purpose**

Use of the Internet and computer for the training of education faculty students has gradually increased their familiarity with technology. Related studies conducted by researchers on the usability of social networks in education tried to test students' approaches to this subject and to measure their success. The present study aimed to investigate preservice teachers' use of social networks, their social network preferences and usability of social networks in education.

### **Hypotheses**

- Preservice teachers' social network use time depends on the number of their friends.
- There is a relationship between the individuals that preservice teachers communicate via social networks and the duration of these individuals' being social network users.
- There is a relationship between gender and those whom preservice teachers communicate with via social networks.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Model**

As the research model of the present study, which aimed at determining pre-service teachers' preferences regarding social networks, the descriptive relational survey model was used. In the study, a questionnaire was applied to determine the views of pre-service teachers about their preferences and use of social networks.

### **Participants**

This study was carried out with a total of 566 pre-service teachers from various departments (Elementary School Teaching, Science Teaching, Pre-School Teaching, French Language Teaching and English Language Teaching) of the Education Faculty of Dicle University in the Spring Term of the academic year of 2011-2012. In the study, the method of "Simple Random Sampling", one of probability sampling methods, was applied. In the simple random sampling method, each member of the research group has equal chance of being selected. The research sample thought to be involved in the study is selected from a list on random basis (Çepni, 2010: 46).

### **Data Collection Tool**

The data to be collected to determine the social network use habits of pre-service teachers were gathered with the help of a questionnaire form developed by the researcher. The questionnaire developed was made up of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire included 3 questions to determine the personal information about the participants, and the second part included 14 questions to determine their social network use habits. Prior to the data collection process, the questionnaire form developed in line with the views of field experts was applied to 50 university level students. The questions found incomprehensible were revised with respect to content and construct. As questionnaires are different from scales, it is not possible to talk about a total score. Therefore, such concepts as reliability and validity are not technically valid for questionnaires as it is for scales. Since the measurement tool used in this study is a questionnaire, taking the views of field experts was considered sufficient for reliability and validity. The printed questionnaire form was distributed to the students, and they were asked to respond to the items in the questionnaire

### **Analysis of Data**

After the questionnaire developed for the study was applied, the research data collected were transferred into the computer environment and analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS 18. In order to describe the data collected, percentages (%), frequencies (f) Fisher Exact and Chi-Square tests were used.

## FINDINGS

This part presents the findings obtained via the statistical analysis of the data with respect to the variables included in the scope of the study. Table 1 shows information about the students' gender and their social network used.

Tablo 1

*Distribution of Percentages and Frequencies Regarding the Preservice Teachers' Gender and Their Social Network Use*

Gender	f	%	Those with a Social Network Account	
			f	%
Male	312	55,12	224	50,91
Female	254	44,88	216	49,09
TOTAL	566	100	440	100
Percentages of Social Network Use			f	%
Yes			416	73,50
No			126	22,26
I have social account, but I haven't used it recently			24	4,24
TOTAL			566	100

According to Table 1, of all the participants, 254 of them were female (44,88%), and 312 of them were male (55,12%). Among those who had a social network account, 50,91% (224) of them were male, and 49,01% (216) of them were female. Of all the students, 73,50% (416) of responded as 'Yes' to the question of "Do you have a social network account?" and used social networks, while 22,26% (126) of them said "No" and did not have any social network account. In addition, 4,24% (24) of all the participants responded as "I have a social account but I haven't used it recently".

In order to determine the relationship between the social network users' responses to the question of "How frequently do you use social networks?" and the number of their friends they communicate via social networks, Chi-Square independence test was conducted.

Table 2

*Chi-Square Test Results Regarding Whether the Preservice Teachers' Social Network Time Depended on the Number of Their Social Network Friends*

Social Network Use Frequencies	Number of Students Friends on Social Network		Total	X <sup>2</sup>	df	p
	<100	>100				
Every day	38 (24,7%)	116 (75,3%)	154	23,33	2	,000
Once in a few days	96 (47,5%)	106 (52,5%)	202	5		
A few times a month	42 (50%)	42 (50%)	84			
Total	176 (40%)	264 (60%)	440			

Of all the students with a social network account, %35 (154) of them used it responding as "Every day"; %45,9 (202) of them as "Once in a few days"; %19,1 (84) of them as "A few times a month". As for the numbers of the students' friends on social networks, they were 40% (176) of them had friends fewer than 100 and 60% (264) of them had friends more than 100. As can be seen in Tabl3 2, the frequencies of social network use depended on the variable of the number of friends that the users communicated via social networks (X<sup>2</sup>=23,335; p<.05). Based on this result, it could be stated that there was a relationship between the preservice teachers' social network use time and the number of their friends on social networks.

Table 3

*Fisher's Exact Test Results Regarding the Relationship between the Individuals the Preservice Teachers Communicated via Social Network and the Duration of These Individuals' Being Social Network Users*

Individuals Communicated with via Social Network	Social Network Use Time		Total	X2	df	p
	1-2 Year	2 Years More				
Friends	92 (35,4%)	168 (64,6%)	260 (59,1%)	5961	1	,016
Friend, Family, Foreigner, Special Person	44 (24,4%)	136 (75,6%)	180 (40,9%)			
Total	136 (30,9%)	304 (69,1%)	440			

Table 3 presents information about whom the students communicated with via social network. Among the students responding to the questionnaire; 59,1% (260) of them with "Friends"; 40,9% (180) of them with "Friends, Family, Foreigner and Special Person"; via social networks. Of all the students responding to the questionnaire, 136 of them for 1-2 years; 304 of them for more than 2 years. The Fisher Exact test result revealed a significant relationship between social network use time and the individuals communicated via social network ( $X^2=5961$ ;  $p<.05$ ). This result demonstrates that there was a relationship between the individuals the preservice teachers communicated with via social network and the duration of these individuals' being social network users

In order to determine the relationship between the variable of gender and the individuals the preservice teachers communicated with via social network, Fisher test was conducted.

Table 4

*Fisher Exact Test Results Regarding the Relationship between Gender and the Individuals the Preservice Teachers Communicated with via Social Network*

Individuals Communicated with via Social Network	Gender		Total	X2	df	p
	Male	Female				
Friends	120 (53,6%)	140 (64,8%)	260	5750	1	,020
Friend, Family, Foreigner, Special Person	104 (46,4%)	76 (35,2%)	180			
Total	224	216	440			

The results of Fisher Exact test revealed a significant relationship between gender and the individual the students communicated with via social network, revealed that the relationship ( $X^2=5750$ ;  $p<.05$ ). This result revealed a relationship between the preservice teachers' gender and the profiles of the individuals they communicated via social networks.

Table 5

*Frequency and percentage distributions regarding the questions found in the questionnaire*

Questions directed in the questionnaire	Yes		No	
	F	%	f	%
Do you find it correct when everybody can see your profile?	72	16,36	268	83,64
Is social network safe for information storage?	120	27,27	320	72,73
Do you join discussions?	332	75,45	108	24,55
Do you conduct group or project works via social networks?	196	45,55	244	55,45
Do lesson videos on the social network influence academic achievement?	396	90	44	10
Is it more comfortable to ask questions to the course teacher via the social network?	284	64,55	156	35,45
Does social network influence academic achievement?	100	22,73	340	77,27

Of all the students, 16,36% of them found it correct when their profiles were open to everyone in social networks, while 83,64% of them did not. Among those who responded to the questionnaire, 72,73% of them stated that social networks were not safe for information storage, while 27,27% of them reported the opposite. Of all the students, 75,45% of them joined discussions via social networks, and 45,55% of them conducted group and project works. The percentage of those who believed that watching the videos on social networks prepared as course materials influenced academic achievement was 90%, while that of those who reported that it was more comfortable to ask questions to the course teacher via social networks was 64,55%. In addition, the percentage of those who believed that social networks influenced academic achievement was 22,73%, while that of those who believed the opposite was 77,27%.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The research findings of the present study were obtained via the analysis of the data gathered from the responses of the students using social networks to the questionnaire applied. Among all the participating students 126 of them (22,26%), who did not use any social networks, responded to the question of "Why don't you use social networks?" saying "The Internet and social networks are a waste of time, and I don't have time to spend on social networks". Also, the students reported that "social networks are not safe, make individuals antisocial and addicted and do not interest me". Ellison and his colleagues (2006), in their study, examined Facebook users as social network users. According to the results obtained by the researchers, the reason for distrust in Facebook was that the identity information about the users in their Facebook profiles was different from their real identity information and that most users try to communicate using their fake identities. Such factors as the spread of information in this way, other similar events reported as news and exploitation of such information by evil-minded people all damage the reliability of such social networks.

The result of the analysis of the research data collected in the present study revealed that of all the participating pre-service teachers, 77,74% of them had social network accounts. The percentage of the students responding to the questionnaire who were active users of social networks was 73,50%.

Among the pre-service teachers participating in the study, 87,27% of them used only Facebook as a social network, while 12,73% of them used Facebook as well as a second social network. It was also revealed that the participating pre-service teachers actively used their social network accounts at least once a week. Tiryaki and Erzurum (2011), in their study on the use of social networks for educational purposes, found out that social networks were actively used by the faculty members and students from the Faculty of Communication Sciences. According to a study conducted by Hamburger, more than %81 of university students who use Facebook visit the related website via their smart phones (Hamburger, 2014). The Chi-Square independence test results demonstrated that the preservice teachers' social network use time had a relationship with the number of their friends they communicated with via social network. It was seen that the preservice teachers' social network use time increased in line with the number of their social network friends. Rayn and colleagues (2011) point out that individuals use social networks to communicate with acquaintances rather than to make new friends or to meet new people. In another study carried out with social media users by Nielsen Wire (2011), it was found that adults actually establish communication with acquaintances in real life and that some of them also tend to make friends with people whom they have never met before. Social networks used by the preservice teachers as a tool for learning and for correspondence attract not only the young population but adults as well (Karataş, 2010).

The results of Fisher Exact test applied to determine the relationship between the individuals the preservice teachers communicated via social network and the duration of these individuals' being social network users revealed that there was a significant relationship between the individuals the preservice teachers communicated via social network and the duration of these individuals' being social network users. In one study carried out by Johnston and colleagues (2011) to investigate the friendships established via Facebook at South Africa and Michigan State universities, it was found that most South African students were new users of Facebook and that they spent 10 to 30 minutes a day on this social network and had about 100 to 150 social network friends. The study also revealed that the students attending Michigan State University obtained Facebook accounts longer ago and that they had about 150 to 200 social network friends and spent longer time on Facebook. Based on this result, it could be stated that students living in developed countries have adopted technology more.

In this study, for the purpose of determining whether there was a relationship between the preservice teachers' gender and the profiles of the individuals they communicated with via social network, Fisher Exact independence test was conducted. The results revealed that there was a relationship between the preservice teachers' gender and the individual they communicated via social network. In one study carried out by Wang and colleagues (2010), the researchers examined the factors influential on virtual friendships. The results of the study revealed that individuals communicate and interact more with the opposite sex. In another study conducted by Vigil (2007) to examine the relationships between male and female users' preferences of friendship and their social styles, it was reported that both male and female individuals established communication with those they feel confidence in on the basis of mutual benefits.

Of all the pre-service teachers participating in the present study, more than half of them (59,1%) used social networks for the purpose of establishing communication with their friends. Rayn and his colleagues (2011) stated that people use social networks not to meet new people or make new friends but to know more about and communicate with people who are in their own social network. In addition, in the present study, it was revealed that the students, though few in number (2,73%), established connection via social networks with other people whom they had never seen before. Social networks, used by students as a means for communication and as a learning tool, are attractive not just for the young population but for older adults as well (Karataş, 2010).

The results obtained revealed that of all the pre-service teachers participating in the study, 88,18% of them were users of social networks at least for one year or longer. In addition, the pre-service teachers did not find it correct to share their profiles via social networks, nor did they believe social networks were safe enough to save information. Rayn his colleagues (2011) point out that it depends on the social network website and on users' preferences whether to make their user profiles open to everybody or not. The researchers, giving LinkedIn as an example, state that users' profiles are open to everybody based on whether they are only followers or they have a pay account. Approximately one-third of the participants in the present study (75,45%) joined discussions regarding any subject, while 45,55% of them reported that they conducted group and project works via social networks. The pre-service teachers participating in this study thought that use of social networks as an educational tool would have positive influence on their academic achievements. According to the results of a number of studies conducted regarding this point, use of social networks for educational purposes increases students' academic achievements at school. The results obtained in the present study are consistent with those obtained in other studies (Brown, 2008; Griffith & Liyanage, 2008; Awodele et. al., 2009; Karademir & Alper, 2011).

The percentage of students who thought that it was more comfortable to ask questions to their course teachers via social networks was found to be 64,55%. In studies examining the use of social networks for educational purposes, it is reported that students establish communication with their teachers more comfortably; that they can ask questions to their teachers regarding their homework and studies; they share books (e-book) and resources; and that they thus become more successful in their courses at school (Yalman, 2015; Muñoz & Towner, 2009). Heather (2009) formed a group on Facebook including a group of pre-service teachers for the course of reading. This group of pre-service teachers used the social network of Facebook as a platform where they discussed their homework, directed questions, criticized their views, shared related information and supported their views. When the results of related studies conducted are taken into consideration as a whole, it is believed that conscious and systematic use of social networks will contribute to individuals' academic achievements and increase the tendency to share the information they have learnt. In order to encourage individuals to use social networks for educational purposes, first of all, teachers should, as role models, be able to use such networks for educational purposes.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

- More comprehensive studies could be designed in relation to conscious and appropriate use of social networks.
- Administrators and faculty members could be informed about effective use of social networks, and the related technical sub-structures could be supported.
- Preservice teachers should be supported so that they can use social networks for their professional development.
- Comprehensive studies could be conducted to regarding how preservice teachers can make more effective use of social networks in the field of education.

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