Higher Education Students’ Awareness Of The Risk Associated With Using Facebook

Dr. Mike Megrove Reddy

Faculty of Humanities and Social Science Department of Communication Science
University of Zululand South Africa.

Abstract
In recent years, Social Networking Sites (SNS) have become the most popular and effective way of communicating. Be it a personal message from one recipient to another or addressing a multitude of followers or friends at once, social media remains a powerful tool for getting a message across. Social media enables users to post and share updates, comments, pictures, videos, and likes. With multiple apps being circulated in the social media arena, Facebook remains a popular choice, with around 2 936 billion monthly users. The Uses and Gratification Theory is the theoretical framework of this paper. The question asked by the author is about higher education students’ awareness of the dangers associated with their inappropriate use of Facebook. He used quantitative research methodology, which is referred to as mixed methods. Questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms to students from the university. The author used content analysis by engaging with secondary sources. The primary sources used were obtained from the Internet, Google Scholar and Z Library. Workshops should be held for all students to create an awareness of the dangers associated with posting inappropriate content on Facebook. Further to this, the author recommends that social media etiquette be included in our school curriculum.

Keywords: Higher Education, students’, inappropriate posting, Facebook.

Introduction
Social Networking Sites (SNS) have become a major part of society’s daily method of communication, with the majority of the globe being on at least one of its SNS. Social Networking Sites (SNSs) portals can undoubtedly serve as effective tools of interpersonal communication, as they maximise available resources, thereby reducing the time spent getting a message across. “Facebook has become an essential part of almost every university student’s daily life, and while a large number of students seem to benefit from the use of Facebook by exchanging information for educational goals, making friends, and other activities, the literature indicates that this social networking site can become addictive to some university students’ users, which is one of the today’s higher education matters” (Zaremohzzabieh, 2014, p.107). However, users should be aware of the risks of having an account on such portals and maintain the required level of scepticism towards unknown content (Prokurat 2015, p. 157). People love to use them to stay in touch with friends and family, exchange photos, or simply
kill some time when they are bored (Prokurat 2015, p. 157). As time progresses, new SNS are being developed, each one with the intent of luring users further down the virtual rabbit hole. Users have the freedom to post pictures and comment on every trending topic, albeit to their hearts’ content. The researcher questioned students’ awareness of the inappropriate use of Facebook.

The innate ability to properly distinguish between the appropriate and inappropriate use of social media may come as second nature to some; however, generation, socio-economic and educational gaps remain a few of the many determining factors in balancing the scale between the proper and improper use of social media. Many of our youth succumb to peer pressure and post inappropriate content, thereby only thinking for the moment and not long term. Youth from rural communities become unwilling victims and post inappropriate content online to look cool and be welcomed into social groups. Students may think that the inherent right to freedom of speech and freedom of expression, enshrined in the constitution, allows them to voice their opinion; however, some remain oblivious to the policies embedded in SNS, social media law and social media policies to which their places of study abide by.

Henderson (2010, p. 5) states that “SNS is built on the sharing of information, including users posting their own text, photographs and video images. In the online environment, the consequences of posting personal information are not always immediately apparent. There is evidence to suggest that, for a variety of reasons, including peer group pressure, young people are less cautious about posting private information to SNS than older users.” The objective of this study is to gauge students’ understanding of the dangers associated with the inappropriate use of Facebook. The researcher used a mixed methods approach in conducting this study by using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A questionnaire was used to gather data via Google maps as it is a quicker and cheaper method of data collecting.

Background

Reddy (2018, p. 250) states, “the usage of social media is becoming a very common means of communication by everyone, especially by the youth and young professionals in society.” In the past, people used various mediums to communicate with friends, family, and colleagues. These various mediums also impacted the way entrepreneurs conducted business and increased their profit margins. Transitioning from an era of sending letters, faxes, telegrams, and emails, social media affords the user the gift of instantaneous communication.

Reddy (2018, p. 250) states, “All higher educational institutions in South Africa offer their students, staff, and guests free Wi-Fi access. Most of the present mobile devices are internet compatible, and therefore going online has become much more accessible.” All that is required of the user is a device with internet capabilities, which will allow them access to the internet where they can freely access multiple SNS online.

One must be vigilant about what is posted online to avoid having anyone and everyone access
to your personal data, such as your mobile phone number. Facebook allows the user to add a mobile number to their profile.

**Statement of Problem**

Henderson (2010) posits that most youth casually post on social media without even thinking about the risk associated with the posting. Their posting, once uploaded, will always remain in the digital world and cannot be removed even if they delete the post. Reddy (2018, p. 251) states that the “inappropriate posting will refer to the posting of information which the conservative members of society will regard or refer to as not acceptable.” The posting of personal information can open a door for stalkers to invade their privacy (Henderson, 2010). They could also become victims of cyberbullying (Henderson, 2010). This study hopes to examine students’ knowledge of Facebook and whether they have been alerted to the potential risks associated with using it.

**Social Media**

Boyd and Ellison (2007, p. 211) defined social network sites (SNSs) as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

There are seven different types of social media sites:
1. Traditional social networking sites.
2. Social review sites.
3. Image and video sharing sites.
4. Video hosting sites.
5. Community blogs.
6. Discussion sites.
7. Sharing economy networks.

Social media users (numbers in the millions)
Figure 1: Global social media users
Source: Statista (January 2022, n.p.)

**Facebook**

In 2004, Facebook was founded by Eduardo Saverin, Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes and Mark Zuckerberg, who were students at Harvard University. After the launch of the site thefacebook.com, it was an instant hit, and within 24 hours, 12 000 students signed, and within one month, half of the undergraduates had a profile (McFadden, 2022, n.p.). “Initially, it was launched for students to connect with other students. Then-student Mark Zuckerberg foresaw a way of bringing the existing social experience of college onto the Internet. He wanted to create a place that could help college students connect with one another” (McFadden, 2022, n.p.). By 2006 it was opened to the globe, and only those older than 13 were allowed to create an account. However, they were to have a valid email address. Currently, there are 4.70 billion people around the world that are currently on social media. In the last year, 227 million new users have become new online users. Dixon (2022, n.p.) states that by 2027 there will be six billion social media users worldwide. “Social network sites like Facebook have become a global phenomenon and are one of the greatest importance means of communication” (Zaremohzzabieh, 2014, p.107).

Facebook has around 2.93 billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2022 (Dixon, 2022, n.p.). “Currently, 77% of internet users are active on at least one Meta Platform. Out of 4.6 billion global Internet users, 3.59 billion people use at least one Meta app every month: Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, or WhatsApp. Many use more than one” (Martin, 2022, n.p.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Facebook Demographics</th>
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<tr>
<td>56% of Facebook users are male.</td>
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<td>44% of Facebook users are female.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The largest demographic group of Facebook users is between the ages of 25 and 35 years. 18.8% are male, and 12.8% of the population are female.</td>
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<td>Around seven-in-ten U.S. adults (69%) use Facebook.</td>
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<td>Seniors aged 65+ are the smallest demographic group on Facebook (4.8%).</td>
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<td>23.8% of Facebook users are 18-24 years of age.</td>
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<td>82% of college graduates are on Facebook.</td>
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<td>75% of online users with an income of more than $75K are on Facebook.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Almost 90% of Facebook’s Daily Active Users Come from Outside the US/Canada.</td>
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<td>The largest population on Facebook is from India, with over 320 million users, followed by 190 million from the US.</td>
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<td>Countries with over 100 million Facebook users include India (320), the USA (190), Indonesia (140), and Brazil (130).</td>
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Source: Salam (2022, n.p.)

Table 1 states that 23.8% of Facebook users are between 18-24. Showing that almost a quarter
of its users are youth. Furthermore, 82% of college graduates are active users on Facebook. Though Facebook was created in America, the largest number of users is from India, with 320 million users, followed by the US, with 190 million users. However, one must keep in mind that this data could be construed due to the number of fake profiles.

**The Positive and Negative use of Facebook**

**Positive use of Facebook**

Facebook is associated with an array of both positive and negative uses. Despite negative implications being associated with Facebook, there still remain a number of positives. If the positives did not outweigh the negatives, Facebook would not be the world’s largest SNS. One positive example Henderson et al. (2011, p. 3) mentions is that “teenagers who are geographically remote or socially marginalised can network with like-minded peers. SNS affords experimentation with an identity which may not otherwise be possible for some young people.” Barricella (2011, para. 1-3) states some of the pros of Facebook:

- Keeping in touch with family and friends.
- Making new friends.
- Expressing oneself.

Tripathi (2014, n.p.) states some of the positives of the use of Facebook, which are as follows:

- Facebook for Networking
- Facebook for Business
- Facebook Video Chatting
- Facebook for Image and Video Hosting
- Facebook for News and Information
- Facebook as a Personal Portfolio

Loveless (2022) states how social media is useful for students.

- Social media connects people from across the globe.
- Social media makes education more accessible for all students.
- Connection with family and friends is easy and simple, regardless of physical distance.
- Young people can showcase their individual talents much easier with social media platforms.
- Social media allows young people to get a more unbiased view of current affairs by having multiple sources at their fingertips.
- Job opportunities are more accessible, both in social media itself and in any other career path.

Among the other positives noted, during COVID-19, Facebook was used as a teaching and learning tool. The available functionalities enable those who are shy to become more sociable and interact with others, enabling people to meet others in similar social circles to engage and collaborate with one another. Religious organisations found themselves at the mercy of governments and strict lockdown regulations, which saw them close their doors. YouTube and
Facebook became the preferred digital platform for religious organisations to conduct services to uplift and teach worshippers and devotees from around the globe.

**Negative use of Facebook**

Tartari (2015, p. 321) states that “students are exposed to the risk of Facebook depression, cyberbullying, and online sexual harassment.” Henderson et al. (2011, p.3) mention that “more recently, a disturbing trend is emerging of children placing naked and explicit photos of themselves and their friends, or photos sent to them via mobile phones (termed ‘sexting’), on sites such as Flickr. These cases highlight that the repercussions of engagement with social networking can be far-reaching and usually unforeseen by the individual involved.”

Barricella (2011, para. 1-3) states some of the cons of Facebook as:

- **Cyberbullying.** It is easy to be a victim of cyberbullying because one can be messaged instantly. And if the contact information is listed or other information is given, they can become prey to cyberbullies.
- **Ruined Relationship.** “Facebook is notorious for causing couples to break up. Let’s face it, no one wants to see their girlfriend/boyfriend telling other people that they look cute, or liking their pictures, or instant messaging them constantly” (Barricella 2021, para.5).
- **Stalker Friendly.** “Facebook is a very stalker-friendly website. Theoretically, someone that you don’t even know can say that they go to your school, add you, and get all of your information. This may include your phone number, house address, and locations you visit frequently.”
- **Moore (2017, n.p.)** posits that “An increasing number of cases of extortion has been reported.” – People become victims of extortion online.

Tripathi (2014, n.p.) states some of the cons of the use of Facebook, which are as follows:

- **Privacy leak**
- **Private status published publicly**
- **Fake Facebook profiles**

Trapp (2022) states the following negatives:

- Those with a strong Facebook presence may display psychological disorders, such as anti-social behaviours, mania, and aggressive tendencies.
- Those students who checked their Facebook most often also had the lowest rates of reading retention.

Another negative characteristic associated with the inappropriate use of SNS is the impact that an unpopular post has on the individual’s reputation. Getting many reactions in the form of likes does not imply that the content posted was received in a positive manner, nor does it imply that the post was acceptable or valuable. Comments and pictures showing an individual participating in criminal acts, such as consuming drugs and being an accomplice to a crime, can have a lifelong, detrimental impact on a person’s life if posted on Facebook. Not only does this constitute as incriminating content, but it also has long-term psychological, criminal and
social effects. Offensive content and comments should never be posted online. A negative attribute associated with Facebook is that students will dedicate time meant for studying to view and share content on Facebook. This does have a ripple effect which impacts their ability to concentrate on active lectures, retain information and their overall academic performance.

Facebook addiction can become another negative. Students’ addiction can affect their sleeping patterns, and they would not have the required sleep per night. Addiction can make students spend less time on their studies, negatively impacting their performance.

Another negative is posting check-in. It may leave a student at being at risk of being stalked. Or it may leave their accommodation at varsity at risk of being robbed. It may leave the homes also at risk of being robbed if they go away with their family.

Catfishing is another negative. Catfishing in recent years has proven to be of major concern amongst all SNSs. Individuals or syndicates create fake profiles, including fake pictures and information about themselves. They create an online façade which is used to deceive and trap unsuspecting users in the hope of enticing people and playing on their victims’ psyche and emotions. This is referred to as deceptive communication, which can have long-lasting effects on the victims psychologically. Another notable dark side of catfishing is the monetary loss suffered by unsuspecting victims as a result of building a relationship with a person who has a fake online profile. CBS News, (2018, n.p.) Victims in the U.S. and Canada say they lost nearly a billion dollars to scammers over the last three years.

**Being Cautious When Using Marketplace**

Students must exercise caution when using Facebook Marketplace. “Since there are many Facebook users, there are scammers and fake buyers in it. This is a major weakness in Facebook Marketplace as both buyers and sellers can become victims of fraud and scams. You will get many messages asking for the price, but you will never hear from them again” (Total Prestige Magazine, 2022, n.p). The general rule when completing a purchase transaction is that both parties must insist on meeting face to face in a public place. In addition, cash-on-delivery should be the preferred method of payment, as opposed to EFTs and Cardless transactions. Recently there has been a sharp increase in the number of people being scammed by sellers. “Two of the most recent incidents of armed robberies in connection to meetups after using Facebook Marketplace occurred in Grand Rapids, Michigan over the summer and another near the Missouri State University campus on November 21, 2017, for nationwide reports.” (Titus, 2017, para. 4). Titus (2017, para. 6-7) goes further on and states, “Experts tell us about alleged sellers asking for money through a third-party service like eBay or Amazon even stealing logos to make invoices look legit. You wire the money, but you never get your stuff. To avoid this happening to you, BBB reminds you to always purchase DIRECTLY from the seller, make sure you see the item in person and report anything suspicious to Facebook Help Center.”

**Guard Your Facebook Account**
There are various tips users can use to safeguard themselves and their Facebook accounts; it all starts with the individual having a strict security setting. Having a strict security setting ensures that friends and family can only view your posts. Refrain from adding your cell phone number to your Facebook account. Since most devices are dual sim enabled, they do not display the cell number used for Banking on Facebook. With a high number of frauds being perpetrated due to sim swaps, displaying your cell phone number on Facebook will have dire consequences if not protected. Make sure you edit your Facebook pages by removing any inappropriate postings, including that of tags. When you receive a friend request/invite, make certain you scrutinise the person’s profile to make sure that they are who they claim to be since it is easy to create fake profiles. Never divulge sensitive information, including your location. Instead of using Facebook to vent, retaliate and post derogatory information, always think of the negative repercussions such a post may have on your life.

When going on vacation, rather post pictures of your trip once you have returned home. Do this so that you do not attract stalkers or people who intend to cause to you and your family. Remove yourself from tags containing inappropriate posting, including comments, pictures, and videos. Inappropriate posts could prove detrimental to a promising career since employers have begun performing background checks on prospective employees. As a student, refrain from posting negative and defamatory content regarding lecturers on Facebook. This will attract unwanted disciplinary action being taken against you and the possibility of a civil suit being initiated against you. Be respectful toward your studies and always display integrity. When you should be on campus attending class, do so, do not bunk school and get caught by posting pictures of you attending social events instead of classes. Make sure you enable the tag review and post review features. This will allow you to accept or decline a post on your timeline.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

For this paper, the author uses the Users and Gratification Theory. This is a mass communication theory that uses media as its crucial aspect. People use media to gratify certain needs. In the earlier days, popular media used were radio and television. Since the turn of the century, social media have become a popular means of instant communication. Widely used because it meets the needs of its users. However, one needs to be cautious because even though we use social media to meet our needs, we should use social media, especially Facebook, with caution.

Limitations

Of the 26 universities in South Africa, this study was limited to one university, The University of Zululand. And of this, one faculty out of the four faculties of the University of Zululand, only one department from the 12 departments at the faculty of Social Science and Humanities was chosen for the study. Notably, only 79 of approximately 300 students from the Department
of Communication Science participated in the survey.

**Research Methodology**

The author uses quantitative research methods. Questionnaires were given to the students from the Department of Communication Science at the University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa, Natal, South Africa. The questionnaire was set up on Google Forms, and links were sent to all the classes from Diploma Classes, Degree Classes, Advance Diploma Classes and Honours classes. There were a total of 79 students who partook in this research. The author also used content analysis. Content analysis, according to Gray (2014, p. 680), is “the examination of qualitative data by either qualitative or quantitative methods by systemically identifying special characteristics (classes or categories).” Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique. Rather than being a single method, current applications of content analysis show three distinct approaches: conventional, directed, or summative. Secondary sources will be used to gather the information that will be analysed. The author used primary sources on social media, Facebook, and dangers which were not appropriate.

**Analysis of Data**

In this section, the author will analyse the data which was gathered. 79 respondents completed the questionnaire.

**Question 1: Gender of the respondent**

![Figure 2: Gender of the respondent](http://www.webology.org)

In Figure 2 above, the author asks the respondents about their gender. There were 72.2% that were female, and 27.8% were male. Showing that more female students participated in the study. There could be various reasons why more females participated in the study, such as the percentage ratio of male to female students who attend the university, the comfort of completing the survey, and eagerness to be part of the research.

**Question 2: Age group of the respondent**
The above graph is indicative of the diverse age groups of the respondents. 93.7% were between 18-30 years, and 6.3% were between 31 and 40. No students between the ages of 40 and 50 responded to the survey. This does not indicate that no students within this age bracket are studying at the university, but it translates to them not participating in the study. At the same time, the data reflects a positive rate of adults between the ages of 31 and 40 who are furthering their studies [by means of obtaining a first-time qualification or adding on to their current academic portfolio].

Question 3: Where do you use the internet the most often?

In Figure 4 above, when asked where do you use the internet most often. A staggering 69.6% of students utilise the internet facilities at the university. 27.8% used the internet at home, and a mere 2.6% connect to the internet elsewhere. The university provides free Wi-Fi for staff, students, and visitors, thereby making it possible for a vast majority of people to have access to the internet on campus.

Question 4: Which social media site do you use most often?
Figure 5: Which social media site do you use most often?

Figure 5 above asks which social media site do you use most often. With a massive response of 69.6%, WhatsApp was the most used SNS. Followed by Facebook with 26.6% and 3.8% of users utilising other SNS. WhatsApp could be the app students easily identify with since it has become the most used digital platform for teaching and learning for the Department of Communication Science.

Question 5: Do you have an active Facebook account?

Figure 6: Do you have an active Facebook account?

From Figure 6, when asked, do they have an active Facebook account, 97.5% stated that yes, they have an active Facebook account, and 2.5% do not have an active Facebook account.

Question No 6: How often do you use your Facebook?
Figure 7 asks how often you use your Facebook. 75.9% used Facebook daily. 13.9% were unsure, and 10.2% used it either once or twice a week. Despite many students indicating they use WhatsApp more than Facebook, as stated in question 4, 75.7% of respondents still use it daily.

Question 7: What do you do most often on Facebook?

In Figure 8, the researcher asked what do you do most often on Facebook? There were 42.9% stated they reacted to the post of others, 31.2% posted pictures, 11.7% commented on the post of others, 10.4% shared the post of others, and 3.8% used Facebook for their status update. Sharing the post of others and posting pictures make up the two largest numbers. The author wishes to add that of the 79 students who participated in the survey, 77 responded to this question.

Question 8: Do you use Facebook to keep connected with family and friends?
In Figure 9, when asked do you use Facebook to keep connected with family and friends? 73.4% of respondents said yes, 24.1% said no, and 2.5% were unsure. Showing that the majority used Facebook to keep connected with family and friends. This information is critical as some students live on-site and Facebook allows them to connect with their loved ones at home.

Question 9: Do you use Facebook for Educational purposes?

In Figure 10 above, when asked do you use Facebook for educational purposes? 46.8% said yes, 39.2% said no, and 13.9% said they were unsure. As stated earlier, WhatsApp is the main SNS used for teaching and learning by the department as their online platform.

Question 10: Are you aware of the dangers associated with posting personal information on Facebook?
In Figure 11, are you aware of the dangers associated with posting personal information on Facebook? There were 92.4% that aware of the dangers of posting personal information on Facebook. The balance of 7.6% consists of the responses, no and unsure. This data reflects that most respondents are aware of the dangers of posting personal information on Facebook.

Question 11: Do you think posting derogatory pictures and videos about yourself will have a negative connotation on your personal and work life?

In Figure 12, the respondents were asked; do you think posting derogatory pictures and videos about yourself will have a negative connotation on your personal and work life? 73.4% stated yes, 20.3% said they were unsure, and 26.3% said no. This is dangerous because when adding the responses of no and unsure, the total Figure is an astounding 46.6%, which is almost 50% of respondents who are not aware of the dangers of posting derogatory pictures and videos on Facebook. 92.4% are aware of the dangers associated with posting personal information on Facebook, as stated in the question above (Question 10).
Conclusion
Marwick and Boyd (2011, n.p.) state that online messages will be progressively intended for huge audiences, taking advantage of social media so as to interact with a large and diverse audience. This paper looks at whether students are aware of the dangers linked to their inappropriate posting on Facebook. The reason the author chose Facebook as part of his case study is that it is the most used SNS. And from the data is also widely used by students. However, students know the dangers of posting personal information on Facebook. They were one-fifth who did not see the danger in posting a derogatory post on Facebook. Such posting can have long-term consequences on students’ life. Facebook has had many positives and even more so during COVID-19 as an educational tool; however, it can also have consequences when not used appropriately.

Recommendation

● People need to be vigilant in monitoring Facebook accounts.
● Any posts which are deemed negative and which may have detrimental implications must be removed from their timeline.
● One should not add or post personal information, which includes email addresses or mobile numbers. This could lead to them being harassed, their details being used to perpetrate fraud and becoming victims of extortion.
● By doing an individual screening of one’s account, the user is able to delete inappropriate posting, comments, pictures and videos.
● Workshops should be held for all students to create an awareness of the dangers of posting inappropriate content on Facebook.
● Further to this, the author recommends that social media etiquette be included in our school curriculum.

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