SOCIAL NETWORKING AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG FILIPINO STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites have tremendously grown since their emergence in the society. The sites have increasingly attracted so many visitors, mostly students. This fact has yielded varied opinions from people as to the effect of social networking on the education of the young. Thus, this study attempted to find out the experiences and effects of social networking on college students, as well as the potential contribution of social networking in improving their academic performance. Frequency count, ranking, percentages, weighted means, and chi-square (X^2) test of association as well as contingency coefficient were the statistical treatments used to quantify the data. Findings reveal that social networking has exposed students to both positive and negative experiences. Interestingly, a significant association between grades in school and social networking is evident. The results of this study indicate that social networking may have a significant contribution in improving the grades of students in school if the students utilize it responsibly. The use of social networking for academic-related activities is therefore recommended to enrich students' educational experience.

Keywords: social networking, engagement, academic performance, general point average

INTRODUCTION

The communication landscape is considerably changing. With the advent of the computing technology, space is virtually cut, but amazingly kept close due to social networking. Interesting features can hook anyone who engages in any of them. Games, videos, photos, movies, and a lot more are either commercially packaged or personally created. Chen and Marcus' study (2012) attests to the fact that the number of those who are hooked with social networking sites has soared. There are sites showing enormous figures of Facebook, LinkedIn, You Tube, and Twitter users, and others.

With the power of social networking to attract web users, the researcher assumes that social networking is a vehicle for knowledge acquisition and a potential contributor in improving the students' academic performance.

Social networking sites have both educational and psychosocial benefits. There are social networking sites that cater to students, teachers, learning institutions, sharing of educational resources, and organization of study groups. Wheeldon (2010) relates that students and teachers can share links, and reviews that can be considered as important tools in providing educational information. This virtual classroom communication allows interaction for students to learn and share skills. It also develops healthy relationships between teachers and students making learning more significant and timely. The search for one's identity, social support, and maturation process can also be facilitated through social networking.

The study of Christine Greenhow (2008) entitled "Educational Benefits of Social Networking Sites Uncovered," unveiled that students are developing a positive attitude towards using technology systems, editing and customizing content and thinking about online design and layout. They are also sharing creative original work like poetry and film, and practicing safe and responsible use of information and technology. Together with the other researchers, she found out that the students identified acquisition of technology skills, creativity, openness to new and diverse views and development of communication skills as among those that they have acquired from social networking engagement.

Social support is a psychosocial benefit that gives importance in social networks interaction. In her study, Tynes (2007) shared that there are times when adolescents struggle with social and emotional concerns and online spaces may serve as their principal or only source of social support. Recent pieces of research have shown that the brain's frontal lobe which allows a person to prioritize thoughts, think abstract, anticipate consequences, plan, and control impulses, is not fully developed in adolescents (Ortiz, 2003). Thus, it is the part of the brain that maturation processes are still developing during the stage of adolescence. As a result, Tynes (2007) argued that the internet provides a space for teens to try out ideas and enhance their decision- making skills. Romantic topics are also discussed in social networking (Suzuki and Calzo 2004; Tynes, 2007). Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) in a study revealed that underclassmen students who are actively and purposively using Facebook Groups have more civic and political inclinations offline.

Social networking sites are avenues for sharing interests, activities, entertainment, and educational opportunities. Boyd and Ellison (2007) disclosed that Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and other sites strengthen relationships and connect people based on shared interest and political views. This validates Wheeldon's (2010) conclusion that social networking sites are used to interact, provide update, keep in touch with existing friends and relatives, or start new relationships using personal profiles. According to Tynes (2007), adolescents who construct profiles, create a video and post it on You Tube, or chat are in the process of constantly creating, recreating, and honing their identities. These processes are similar to learning experiences that transpire in the classroom when the students encounter different

personalities. They learn how to deal with different people.   Tynes (2006) also discussed that perspective-taking skills can improve as a result of computer-mediated interaction with people from different backgrounds.

Despite the explicit advantages of social networking sites, bullying which is a manifestation of abuse and aggression is a great disadvantage. In the words of Whitney and Smith (1993) and Olwens (1999) as cited in the article of Beran and Li (2005) bullying is an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or individual repeatedly against a helpless victim usually inside the school premises.   Aricak, et al., (2008) has defined school bullying as the victimization of a student by being repeatedly exposed to physical or verbal manipulation and humiliation.   Bullying has expanded to the cyberspace, hence the term cyber bullying.

Cyber bullying is an intentional virtual aggression by peers using modern-day technology. For instance, Katz, (2001) emphasized that adolescents exposed to the internet have experienced sexual harassment. Victims of virtual aggression have the tendency to be emotional and experience feelings of discomfort. Beran and Li (2005) further cited that several victims of cyber harassment indicated feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, and fear that may have impaired their ability to concentrate and succeed academically.   There are concerned groups and individuals who are working hard to curb cyber bullying. In the Philippines, Republic Act 10175 also known as "Cybercrime Prevention Act of 2012" is a law that looks at how

individuals using the internet can be protected. Koo wrote in the Philippine Daily Inquirer (August 21, 2011) that schools should teach "cyber ethics" in values education classes.

Nathaniel Oye et al.'s study (2012) sought the opinion of the respondents pertaining the influence of social networking sites on their academic performance. The results revealed that majority of the younger students are exposed to social networking for socialization rather than for academic purpose. Some students however, felt that social networking have more positive impact on their academic performance.

In a related study, Paul, Baker, and Cochran (2012) examined the impact of on-line social networking on the academic performance of the business students enrolled in a state university using the Structural Equation Modeling System (SEM). The results indicated that "there is a positive, but indirect, relationship between academic competence and academic performance." Managing one's time well can improve academic performance but the students do not believe that on-line social networking can improve their academic performance. Students who know how to budget their time wisely have marked improvement in their academic performance.

Junco (2011) "examined the multiple measures of frequency of facebook use, participation in facebook activities, and time spent for preparing for class and actual overall GPA." He concluded that other variables not only Facebook usage, may be examined, as these might be strongly related to GPA (general point average) and time spent in class. This conclusion was made after the results of his research displayed "that time spent on Facebook

was strongly negatively related to overall GPA, while only weakly related to time spent for class preparation."

The study of Chen and Marcus in 2012 sought to find out whether two important variables which are personality and culture have something to do with how students present themselves in social networking. It revealed that those who disclosed the least via on-line were *low in extraversion.* The need to maintain personal relationship was presented by Chen and Marcus as the primary reason why students are engaged in social networking. Chen and Marcus suggested that collaboration has to be entered into by both the faculty and the students to safeguard the students from potential risks involved in disclosure, like privacy. Just like Chen and Marcus, other researchers like Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2010) presented the idea of encouraging the students to develop their sense of collaboration and working together to sustain their desire to be connected to each other via online social networking. They explored different factors that motivate the students to engage in social networking. The study exposed that people use Facebook as the channel to communicate and connect with friends. Group norms and similarities in terms of the valuing process determine the people's intention to sustain their online social networking.

Some related studies and literature reviewed revealed that social networking can influence academic performance, but others negated this idea. Attention span, socio-demographic factors, and study habits are said to be contributing to academic performance rather than the use of social networking. Personality factors also play a significant role in the

utilization of on-line social networking sites and academic performance. Nonetheless, the social networking space which provide teachers, students, and academic institutions with the opportunities for collaboration and strengthening relationships is an area that the researcher claims a potential ground for academic enhancement. It is presumed that when trust is present, and the atmosphere is relaxing, there is a possibility that learning takes place.

Social networking alongside psychosocial benefits can be further explored as channels in determining academic performance. After all, learners are expected to assess technology and determine its effects in their own growth and development. With the guidance of an adult, specifically, a teacher, students can maximize the use of technology for their own advantage.

This study is anchored on four (4) very important theories. One is the **Uses and Gratification Theory** espoused by Bhronler and Katz in 1974. This theory deals with the free will of the individual to choose from the wide array of social media.

The second media theory is the **Media-Dependency Theory** as postulated by Ball-Rokeach (1976-1989); and Baran Davis, (2009) highlights the fact that the more a media consumer would adhere to a kind of media source for his/her needs to be fulfilled by it, the more time he/she will spend time on it, and the probability of his/her being influenced by whatever it brings will be greater. Some examples of needs that could be met pertain to "understanding the social world (current events), conforming to social norms (trends, pop culture), and fantasy-escape from social reality (entertainment)."

Connectivism posited by George Siemens (2004) is the third theory that deals with the link that one makes with the present state of knowledge that he/she possesses. This theory recognizes the fact that not everything associated within the changing system and changing world can be within one's control. Learning can take place constantly, and one's ability to maintain a system of assessing new knowledge is an important skill that every learner needs to have. Connectivism in essence provides insight into learning skills and tasks needed for learners to flourish in a digital era.

Finally, the last theory included in this study is Constructivism (Driscoll, 2000). Constructivism deals with the idea in which learners constantly create meaning with the experience that they go through in life.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive-evaluative research. It aimed to describe and evaluate the existing condition of the social networking engagement among selected students of Negros Oriental State University enrolled within the first semester of school year 2013-2014. Specifically, it attempted to determine whether such engagement has contributed to the enhancement of their academic performance or not. In addition, the study sought to determine whether these same respondents have experienced unpleasant encounters in their social networking engagements.

It utilized a validated researcher-made questionnaire. The validation involved 5 heterogeneous sections of college students enrolled in the same school year and enrolled either in an English or Literature class. These students were not included as actual respondents. Confidentiality of the responses was stipulated on each questionnaire and emphasized during the actual distribution of the same. The respondents were all enrolled in 8 different colleges of the university under the College of Arts and Sciences at the time of this study. Moreover, a request was addressed to the Registrar's Office to furnish the researcher with the GPAs of the 966 respondents. To maintain anonymity, only the GPAs were furnished to the researcher. This was done to uphold research ethics.

The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of .05 per cent allowance for non-precision of data because of the use of samples instead of the total population. The statistical treatment used include the frequency count, percentages, ranking, chi-square (X^2) test of association as well as contingency coefficient were used to determine whether social networking has a significant contribution in improving the grades of the students in school. Weighted means were used to determine the academic performance of the students. All data were treated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 17.0).

RESULTS

Majority of the respondents are second year college students, spread across eight (8) different colleges, within the18-20 age-bracket, and generally female. The family income is

within Php 5,000.00 and below mostly derived from the parents' occupations. Their jobs are low-paying and are often seasonal in nature (farmers, drivers, businessman-self-employed, laborer, and carpenter). Fifty per cent of the mothers are housewives who are not at all contributing to the combined family income. The rest (vendors, farmers, businesswomen /self-employed) do not have regular paychecks, except the teachers (53, 5.49%).

Nine hundred forty-five respondents (945, 97.83%) are frequently visiting the Facebook site. Generally, the respondents spend only an hour per day/night in social networking. Most of the respondents are frequently found in the internet cafés (592, 61.28%). A good number though are only found in their households because they have their own computer units (304, 31.47%). There are also students who frequently use the school's internet system (156, 16.15%).

The students frequently visit social networking sites to connect with their teachers pertaining assignments/projects to be done (451, 46.69%), connect with their friends (246, 25.47%) for academic-related or school-related assignments, projects, and information, and connect with friends for entertainment/relaxation purposes (183, 18.94%). This is a good indication that majority of the respondents are making use of this technology as an avenue for improving their scholastic performance. Furthermore, the results may be a fair indication that the respondents do not usually spend their time in social networking beyond what they think is necessary and what they could afford. Table 1 shows a mixture of both the positive and negative experiences the students were exposed to in social networking.

Table 1. Respondents' Social Networking Experiences (n=966)

Experiences	Frequency	Percent
admired for my skills in communicating	355	36.75
invited as a friend because of my social skills	329	34.06
asked for any form of advice	160	16.56
asked to help in the academic-related problem of a friend	66	6.83
appreciated	55	5.69
harassed/harmed/threatened/blackmailed/	43	4.45
humiliated/embarrassed	21	2.17
Received sexual remarks/sexual invitations	45	4.66
Received hate, cruel messages or images	13	1.35
Someone used my account when I forgot to log out	23	2.38
bullied	16	1.66

The respondents have very good experiences while engaging in social networking. There are about 355 (36.75%) respondents who were admired because of their communication skills, 329 (34.06) respondents were invited as friends because of their social skills, 160 (16.56%) respondents were asked for a piece of advice, 66 (6.83%) respondents were asked to help in academic-related problems, and 55 (5.69%) respondents being appreciated. However, combining all the negative experiences can amount to 161 (16.67%) respondents. The results show that social networking exposes the respondents to both positive and negative experiences.

The results of the research also include a disclosure about the respondents' feelings about their   good experiences while engaging in social networking. Six hundred twenty-five (625, 64.70%) felt good about their social networking experience, 122 (12.63%) thought that they became more confident in dealing with friends and managing their studies, and

118 (12.22%) felt inspired to do well with their studies. These are manifestations of positive

emotions.

There are also multiple reasons about how they felt concerning their negative

experiences. The most obvious is getting hurt with 505 (52.28%) respondents, 144 (14.91%)

became helpless, and 135 (13.98%) respondents' studies were affected.   The negative

emotions are obvious manifestations of the nature of the adolescents who at this stage

tend to act upon impulse often brought about by poor judgment (Tynes 2007). Likewise,

those who become victims of virtual aggression (Katz, 2001) tend to experience emotional

discomfort.

Table 2. Responses as to whether social networking contributed positively to performance in school (n=966)

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	680	70.39
No	286	29.61
Total	966	100.00

A little over 70% of the students responded that social networking has contributed

positively to how well they are performing in school. In all likelihood, those who responded

with a **yes**, are the same respondents who indicated that they use social networking mostly for

academic-related activities (697, 72.16%)). Thus, their engagement in social networking with a

clear purpose has contributed to a positive improvement in their school performance.

Table 3. Respondents' Grades in School (n=680)

Grade Distribution	Frequency	Percent	Verbal Description

95-100	21	3.09	Excellent
90-94	85	12.50	Very Good
80-89	501	73.68	Good
75-79	73	10.74	Fair
Total	680	100.00	

Majority of the respondents (501, 73.68%) had a GPA within the 80-89 grade distribution bracket which is interpreted as **Good.** This is followed by those students who got a GPA within the 90-94 grade distribution bracket, and this is interpreted as **Very Good.** The findings may indicate the positive effect of engaging in social networking since majority of the respondents use the technology for course-related activities.

Table 4. Chi-Square Results for Social Networking and Grades in School at 5% Level of Significance

Variables Associated: Social Networking and Grades in School
Hypotheses:
Ho: There is no significant association between grades in school and social networking.
Ha: There is a significant association between grades in school and social networking.
Decision:
Reject Ho because p-value is less than the α value.
Ha is accepted.

The chi-square result shows that there is a significant association between grades in school and social networking. This result dovetails with the reasons why the respondents go into social networking with 46.69% visiting social networking sites to connect with their teachers and 25.47% to connect with their friends for school-related assignments, projects, and information. Social networking therefore in this context is generally utilized for educational purposes.

Other responses indicate that social networking has contributed to the improvement of the students' communication skills. These are in written English (638,   66.05%), spelling words and writing sentences (135, 13.98%), and the corrections made by their friends and chat mates (89, 9.21%).   The results affirm Greenhow's study (2008) which discusses the tremendous educational potential offered by websites.

The respondents recommend social networking since it can make them gain more friends (494, 51.14%), they can have access to information that they need from friends, teachers, and members of their clubs/organizations 302, 31.26%), and think that their academic performance is enhanced by social networking (86, 8.90%).   These findings tie up with Oye et al.'s findings (2012) that students engaged in social networking for socialization purposes but also felt that that social networking has a positive impact on their academic performance.

Only 131 respondents do not recommend social networking since it is a waste of time (49, 5.07%); it can make them a victim of cyber bullying (43, 4.45%); and it can destroy their study habits (24, 2.48%).   The studies of Katz (2001), and Beran and Li (2005) prove that negative experiences are sources of emotional discomfort and impediments in academic success.

Finally, the respondents commented that social networking is a great help in school, in job placements, and in enhancing communication skills (256, 26.50%).   It also strengthens

family ties and friendly relationships (196, 20.29%). A good number though, sees it as neither good nor bad, but must be studied well before using the technology (207, 21.43%).

DISCUSSION

The respondents of this study are generally female, 18-20 years old, enrolled in the 8 different colleges of NORSU main campuses 1 and 2 and are in the second year of their college education. Most of the respondents' families are living below the poverty line which is in all likelihood the reason why the respondents who frequently visit the Facebook site generally spend only an hour per day/night usually in the internet cafés. They usually visit the site for academic-related or school-related assignments and projects. Thus, this is an indication that the students exercise their free will in choosing the social networking site they wish to visit armed with a positive purpose. The observance of the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Connectivism are evident in this context.

The respondents mostly have good experiences while using the social networking site. These good experiences make them more confident in dealing with their friends, and serve as their inspiration in their studies. Thus, they are recommending the use of social networking sites to gain more friends and be assisted in the academic-related activities. The mere fact that the students are recommending the sites is a reason to believe that they trust that social networking can fulfill their educational quest. This is a validation of the Media-Dependency Theory. On the other hand, some respondents got hurt, became helpless, and were affected in

their studies when they encountered bad experiences from social networking. These same respondents think that social networking can be an avenue for cyber bullying and is also a waste of time for it cannot help them with their studies. Others however, see it as neither good nor bad.

The researcher's claim that social networking is a potential contributor to the students' academic performance is positively affirmed on the merit that the students obtained good grades and that they have been helped in their academic-related concerns. The result is an indication that social networking can be one of the factors that may contribute to improving the grades of the students if the students use social networking for educational purposes. The chi-square results for social networking and grades in school at 5% level of significance in this study further exhibited that there is a significant association between grades in school and social networking. There is reason to believe that the result is greatly affected by the purpose of the respondents in using social networking. The result is limited though to only 680 out of 966 students respondents, since the general point average of the rest of the respondents were not available yet during the conduct of this study.

The researcher agrees with Junco (2011) that other factors may be examined aside from Facebook usage in determining overall general point average. As a matter of fact, Kirschner and Karpinski (2010, as cited in Junco) who noted in their study that those who were using the Facebook spent only fewer hours in studying per week, is already a factor that can be further examined. However, the potential of social networking as an avenue for improving academic

performance cannot be totally ignored. Maintaining personal relationship presented by Chen and Marcus (2012) and development of collaboration by Cheung, Chiu, and Lee (2010) can serve as springboards in sustaining purposive on-line social networking.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that social networking can be of great help in enhancing the academic performance of the students when the purpose for doing so is aligned with school-related matters and advancement of knowledge and skills. The good experiences as well as the primary purpose why students are engaged in social networking may be considered facilitative factors in improving their grades. Thus, faculty members are encouraged to make use of social networking inside the classroom, in the university's internet research station, and in the Blended Learning method. With social networking used as the channel to deliver instruction, the potential for academic performance is within reach despite the physical distance. It is also a positive stance in the management of modern-day technology as an aid in the media-mediated educational process.

Considering the financial status of the respondents, the university may study the possibility of improving the service delivery of the Internet Research Station.

Social networking sites are good avenues for the development of critical thinking skills and creative skills of the students, as well as promoting worthwhile values with emphasis on

cyber ethics. In this manner, unpleasant encounters in social networking may be minimized, if not totally eliminated.

Other studies focusing on the adverse effects of social networking and analyzing the kind and content of posts done by those engaged in social networking to determine their proficiency in the use of the English language and other languages can be proposed.

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