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RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

Study on the Facebook Usage of Undergraduates at the **University of Vocational Technology, Sri Lanka**

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1 INTRODUCTION

The starting point of social networking websites can be traced to the 1960s and it has evolved in different ways to what exists at present. Nowadays, social networking plays major roles in education, entertainment and business apart from bridging the gap between people who reside far away from each other. Among the many social networking websites in existence today, Facebook is considered the leading social networking site among internet users around the globe as well as in Sri Lanka. According to statistics from the Pew Research Centre in 2016, there are over 3.5 million active Facebook users in Sri Lanka, and the majority of them are between the age of 18 and 24 years. They form 74% of the total active Facebook users in the country. Moreover, 32% of active Facebook users in Sri Lanka belong to the age group between 25 and 34 (Internet Usage Statistics in Sri Lanka, 2017).

Many researchers have studied the positive and negative impact of Facebook on the academic performance of undergraduates in different universities around the globe. Even though researchers argue about the use of Facebook as an educational tool, many have studied and proved that it can adversely affect academic performance (Arora and Karim, 2016, Zekiri, 2016).

However, in the Sri Lankan context, only a limited number of research studies have been carried out regarding Facebook and its impact on the academic performance of undergraduates (Thuseethan and Kuhanesan, 2014). The University of Vocational Technology, which was established by Parliamentary Act No. 31 of 2008, has undergraduates pursuing two different modes of studies in two faculties. At present, the university has full-time (batch 1) and part-time (batch 2) undergraduates, who are conducting their studies on weekdays and weekends respectively.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This study expected to build a vast amount of knowledge related to the Facebook usage of undergraduates at the University of Vocational Technology. The following were the research questions for this study.

1. To what extent and for what purposes do undergraduates in the University of Vocational Technology use Facebook?

2. What are their perceptions of the use of Facebook?

3. Is there a relationship between the time spent on Facebook and their academic performance?

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This research study was designed as a survey, which was conducted among the part-time and full-time undergraduates in various disciplines at the University of Vocational Technology, Ratmalana.

2.2 Sampling Procedure

There is a difficulty in getting responses from all undergraduates of the university. At present, the total student population of the university in both full-time and part-time study programs is 1,198. The characteristics of both these groups (part-time and full-time) are different from each other. Fulltime undergraduates dedicate all their time to studies, whereas part-time undergraduates are are employed in various industries and studying for their degree on weekends. Due to these reasons, the research was designed in a way that the sample was determined by using the stratified random sampling method. Two strata were determined for full-time and part-time students, which consisted of equal number of respondents for each stratum, to avoid the biases in results and discussion of results. The total number of respondents was 118.

2.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This research was carried out by conducting a survey to solicit primary data from respondents. The survey instrument was a questionnaire consisted of close-ended and open-ended questions, which focused on the Facebook usage habits and academic practices of undergraduates at the University of Vocational Technology.

Apart from that, the questionnaire attempted to collect data relating to the undergraduates' perceptions of Facebook usage by using Likert scale type questions.

The Likert scale type questions tried to receive a rating on various opinions which had a rating from 1 to 5.

The questionnaire consisted of questions to receive both categorical and numerical data. The data was analyzed using the software package iNZight, which was developed by the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Spearmen Rank Correlation was used to identify the correlation coefficient between the time spent on Facebook by individuals and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When considering the extent of Facebook usage, 45% of the undergraduates, who form the largest proportion, have used Facebook for more than 6 years. Fifty-two percent of the undergraduates visit Facebook several times each day 7% of them visit Facebook once a month, which is the lowest proportion. Considering Facebook usage on university premises, 65% of the undergraduates use Facebook on university premises, and the computer laboratories are the most popular (68%) place for students to visit Facebook. On average a full-time undergraduate spends approximately 2 hours, and a part-time undergraduate spends 1 hour and 25 minutes on Facebook. The most popular device which Facebook usage is powered by is mobile phones which is 84%, compared to other different devices.

When considering the purposes for which undergraduates use Facebook, undergraduates are very keen on the updates about friends and families (84%), songs/films/sports (34%) and wedding/photography and bridal (34%). Apart from this, 83% of the undergraduates are using Facebook for educational purposes. However, 75% of them are using Facebook to share lecture materials and to get to know about news

related to their degree programs, at the same time 25% of the undergraduates use Facebook to improve their knowledge related to the subjects that they study and others are interested in areas such as health, photography, etc. Undergraduates have ranked their top five activities on Facebook, i.e.(from first to fifth) moving up and down in the Facebook wall, commenting on Facebook posts, sharing others' posts, uploading photos and videos and chatting with friends
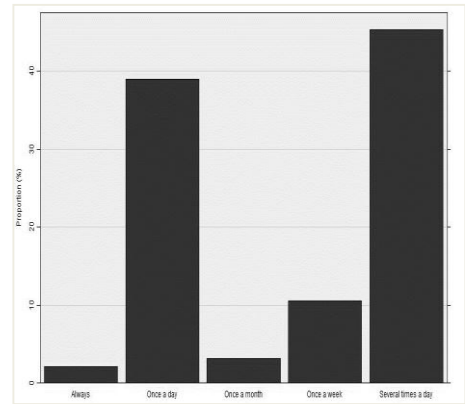

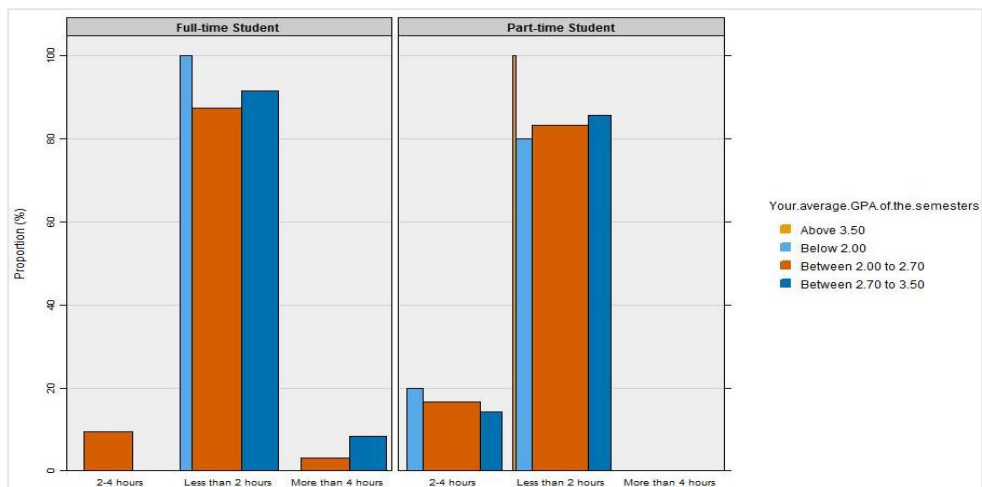**Figure 1:** No. of times FB used by undergraduates

Figure 2: CGPA of the undergraduates according to the time spent on Facebook

When considering the time spent on Facebook and academic performance, seventy-eight percent of the undergraduates, who form the majority, do not use Facebook during the examinations of the degree program.

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient between time spent in hours and the CGPA is -0.41, which indicates that there is a negative relationship between the two variables. However, there are many other factors (cognitive ability, environment) that may influence the CGPA of a student, which are considered to be limitations of the study.

In considering the perceptions of the Facebook usage, 68% of the undergraduates have strongly agreed that Facebook is important to stay connected with society, while 46% have strongly agreed that Facebook is the best social networking site among others which motivates them to use it. Furthermore, thirty two percent of the undergraduates have a neutral view of the question as to whether time spent on Facebook is not a wastage, while they have enjoyed playing games and chatting with friends. Fifty percent of the undergraduates have agreed that if they reduce the time spent on Facebook they can use that time for more educational activities.

Table 1.Perceptions of undergraduates on the use of Facebook

Likert Scale Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Facebook is important to stay connected with the community.	3%	4%	5%	23%	68%
Facebook is one of the best ways to communicate with people around me.	7%	13%	17%	43%	20%
Facebook is the best of the social networking sites, that is why I am using it.	3%	11%	23%	17%	46%
Facebook is helpful in finding my old friends.	5%	7%	9%	35%	44%
It is important to update my status always on Facebook.	16%	39%	20%	21%	4%
I highly expect my friends to react to my posts.	12%	25%	21%	5%	37%
I do not think time spent on Facebook is a waste.	16%	25%	32%	23%	4%
Chatting with my friends and playing games are really enjoyable.	6%	20%	31%	35%	8%
I believe Facebook does not distract me from my studies anyway.	7%	16%	34%	26%	17%
I definitely look for new updates on Facebook each and every morning.	13%	22%	23%	31%	11%
The majority of the content on Facebook has no importance to anybody.	3%	19%	26%	41%	11%
If I reduce the time I spend on Facebook, I can use that time to something valuable.	6%	7%	10%	27%	50%

.4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research is to study the Facebook usage of undergraduates of the University of Vocational Technology, where studies are pursued in two different modes. It is clear that there is a significant difference in Facebook usage between full-time and part-time undergraduates with fulltime undergraduates tending to spend more time on Facebook in comparison with part-time students. Being connected with friends and families is portrayed as a key use, while a small proportion of students utilize it to carryout educational activities. Finally, excluding cognitive abilities and other environmental factors, which can influence CGPA, time spent on Facebook, has a negative relationship which is an alarming fact for undergraduates. Although the students still strictly agree that Facebook is important to stay connected with society, they also believe that if they can reduce their Facebook usage the time they save can be spent in a meaningful manner and this can boost their studies.

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