

Chapter 74

United States and European Students' Social–Networking Site Activities and Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT

Different cultures communicate differently. Research is beginning to examine the differences in culture related to social-networking site (SNS) use. Differences in specific SNS activities related to academic performance among United States (US; $n = 446$) and European ($n = 394$) university students were examined. Moderated Multiple Regressions indicated that using SNSs for “career” and “school” were positively predictive of Grade Point Average (GPA) for both US and European students. For US students, “staying in touch with online friends” was negatively predictive. Results highlight the positive and negative relationships between various SNS activities and GPA, but specifically the use of SNSs for academic versus socialization purposes cross-culturally.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States (US), people spend an extensive amount of time online (comScore, Inc., 2013a) on desktop, and increasingly mobile, platforms (comScore, Inc., 2014). Approximately one in every five minutes spent online is on social-networking sites (SNSs). Facebook®, for example, is third in worldwide website rank, accounting for five out of every six minutes spent on SNSs. Since its inception, Facebook® monthly active users have increased to 2.2 billion as of July 2014 (Edwards, 2014).

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As it stands today, there are only seven cultural markets where Facebook® is not the leading social network, highlighting its global reach. In the US over the past year, the top visited web properties were Google® (191,363 unique visitors) followed by Yahoo (184,935 unique visitors), Microsoft Sites® (168,899), and Facebook® (149,602); however, Facebook® led in engagement with 10.8% minutes spent online out of all websites, and a dominant 83% of time out of all other SNSs (comScore, Inc., 2013a). In Europe (EU) in 2012, 408.3 million people used the Internet with their home or work computer (comScore, Inc., 2013b). The top visited web properties included Google® (375,260 unique visitors) followed by Facebook® (275,882 unique visitors). Additionally, 6.7 hours per person per month were spent on social media sites (i.e., social networks and blogs).

Though very popular and hailed by some as positive, SNSs also are said to have a “dark side” (Sogeti VINT, 2013) with respect to diminishing privacy, negative health issues, feelings of isolation and cyberbullying (e.g., sometimes leading to suicide), cyberstalking and trolling, attention deficits/loss of ability to concentrate (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009), addiction (Meerkerk, Van den Eijnden, Vermulst, & Garretsen, 2009; Moreno, Jelenchick, Christakis, 2013) and last but not least, decreased productivity (e.g., Brandtzæg, Lüders, & Skjetne, 2010; Kross et al., 2013; Kwan & Skoric, 2013; Nucleus Research, Inc., 2009). And this general decreased productivity can include learning efficiency. The questions asked here include: Are these effects attributed to SNSs in general, or are there cultural differences in the use and impact of SNSs? And if there are cultural differences, what do these include?

Due to its worldwide expansion, researchers are beginning to examine cultural differences in SNS use (e.g., Karpinski, Kirschner, Ozer, Mellott, & Ochwo, 2013; Ozer, Karpinski, & Kirschner, 2014). Culture, which can be defined as the shared perception of social environment within a specific definable group, shapes the way that people behave, communicate, and how they build relationships with each other (Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996; Hofstede, 2001). Research has shown that cultures or broad cultural contexts (e.g., US, EU) can influence both the patterns of media use (i.e., social or otherwise) and attitudes toward them (Chapman & Lahav, 2008; Garramone, Harris, & Anderson, 1986; Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Vasalou, Joinson, & Courvoisier, 2010). If this is the case for social media use in general, culture may also shape the motivations, attitudes, and activity patterns of SNS use in other contexts such as the academic environment.

Even though a direct relationship between SNS use and academic performance has been debated (e.g., Junco, 2012b; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Lubis et al., 2012; Pasek, more, & Hargittai, 2009; Stollak, Vandenberg, Burklund, & Weiss, 2011), multitasking with various technologies or media while studying has been implicated as a potential negative influence on students' academic outcomes (e.g., Junco & Cotten, 2011; Kirschner & van Merriënboer, 2013; Mayer & Moreno, 2003; Rosen, Lim, Carrier, & Cheever, 2011). Research has begun to examine how multitasking moderates the relationship between SNS use and academic performance cross-culturally (i.e., between the US and EU; Karpinski et al., 2013). This study (i.e., Karpinski et al., 2013), among many others, measured SNS use as minutes/day (i.e., general frequency of use), without considering the types of activities in which students are engaged as an important factor in the proposed detrimental impact on academic performance.

The current study examined cross-cultural differences in SNS use by investigating the influence of various SNS activities on academic performance. This adds to the previous research pool (e.g., Junco, 2012b; Karpinski et al., 2013) as social media is the norm inside and outside the classroom for Millennials who are currently in college as undergraduate or graduate students. Millennials, who are in their early 30's or younger, represent a large proportion of the university student population. This group has been immersed from a young age in a rapidly progressing digital world that in three decades has wit-

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