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Do educational affordances and gratifications drive intensive Facebook use among adolescents?

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents are active users of Facebook and are spending an increasing amount of their daily time on its use. Several recent studies have advocated the need to integrate Facebook use into our existing educational practices. However, at the same time, scholars and educators are wary of the fact that intensive Facebook use (IFU) may not translate into educational uses, learning outcomes and academic well-being. IFU represents an important service use concept that evaluates any user's emotional attachment, connectivity and integration with Facebook use. To address this gap, the present study investigated the role of different Facebook U&G and educational affordances in predicting the IFU among adolescents. A cross-sectional study with 942 adolescent Facebook users from India was conducted. The study results suggest that content U&G did not, while process, technology and social U&G did, play significant roles in predicting IFU. In comparison to Facebook U&G, different educational affordances, namely perceptions of Facebook use in Mathematics, Science and English education, perceptions of its formal use in classrooms and academic information seeking and sharing, did not significantly predict IFU. The study concludes with various theoretical and practical implications for scholars, educational solution developers, pedagogical experts as well as education policy makers.

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1. Introduction

Young people tend to use online social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook for different reasons including building and maintenance of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008), online self-presentation (Dhir, 2016a; Dhir, Pallesen, Torsheim & Andreassen, 2016; Dhir & Torsheim, 2016), and most importantly, for sharing and seeking information (Livingstone, 2008; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Yermolayeva, 2009). The majority of the existing literature examining the use of SNS by young people focuses on privacy, self-identity, and friendship as well as peer structure related issues

(Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). However, relatively few research investigations have been carried out with the aim of understanding the educational affordances of Facebook use (see Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Manca & Ranieri, 2013). Furthermore, little is known regarding whether Facebook can be integrated into the existing educational practices in schools.

Scholars have emphasized that Facebook has several educational merits (Arteaga Sánchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014) and its educational role is also consistent with the popular learning hypothesis of connectivism (Siemens, 2005). Manca and Ranieri (2013) argued that scholars, practitioners and educators must realize that Facebook use is becoming more popular day by day at an impressive adoption rate, and that there is a current user base of 1.55 billion active users (Facebook statistics, 2015). The educational merits of Facebook include the following: 1) It has become a suitable platform for supporting collaborative projects for students due

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to its widespread popularity, design features, external connectivity and support for open projects; 2) Young people are already familiar with Facebook's different features; due to this, its potential use in education can reduce the risk of technological frustration, considered a potential barrier to the success of any learning experiment (Manca & Ranieri, 2013); 3) Facebook can support learning through the exploration, connection, creation and evaluation of a network of people, which also involves online interactions with content (Manca & Ranieri, 2013).

Despite its huge educational potential, the role of Facebook use as part of our existing educational practices at schools is still limited (Arteaga Sánchez et al., 2014; EDUCAUSE, 2012; Smith & Caruso, 2010). The primary accounting reason could be the lack of strong and comprehensive empirical studies to understand the educational potential of Facebook use as suggested by the recent literature (Arteaga Sánchez et al., 2014; Manca & Ranieri, 2013; Yang, Wang, Woo, & Quek, 2011). It is currently not known what the different educational affordances offered by Facebook use are for adolescents. What are the uses and gratifications (U&G) of Facebook sought by adolescents? Which educational affordances and Facebook U&G drive intensive Facebook use (IFU) among adolescents? IFU is an important service use concept that measures users' emotional connectedness and engagement with Facebook use (Ellison et al., 2007). It is considered superior in comparison to traditional standards of frequency of use, time spent or duration of service uses since IFU takes into account the richness of the user experience provided by Facebook use (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Dhir & Tsai, 2016). It is important for scholars and practitioners to understand the empirical linkages between three key and important concepts, namely educational affordances, Facebook U&G and IFU, due to various associated reasons. First, this investigation will enable scholars to get to the heart of the different reasons underlying the increasing popularity of Facebook and its intensive use among adolescents. Second, it will unearth those different motives and reasons which can drive intensive use of any SNS among adolescents. Third, this line of inquiry will help them to better understand the educational potential of popular SNS including Facebook. Fourth, the proposed investigation is relevant for educators, parents and scholars who often struggle to judge whether intensive use of SNS including Facebook use among adolescents is due to its educational affordances and academic uses.

Our systematic review of the prior literature examining the educational potential of SNS including Facebook led to the identification of two other major limitations. First, the prior literature focused almost exclusively on university-attending undergraduate students (Dhir & Tsai, 2016). In comparison, other equally important demographic groups such as adolescents have rarely been studied in prior computer-mediated communication literature (Dhir, 2015, 2016b). This is important since adolescents are both active and persistent users of Facebook, and are known for their intensive use (Hofstra, Corten, & Tubergen, 2015). Second, almost all of the existing studies examining the educational uses of Facebook have originated from the United States (US), other western and East Asian countries (see Arteaga Sánchez et al., 2014; Lampe, Wohn, Vitak, Ellison, & Wash, 2011; Park & Lee, 2014). Consequently, little understanding exists of the perceptions, attitudes and use behavior of Facebook users from the developing world (e.g., India) (Dhir, Chen & Chen, 2015; Dhir, Kaur, Lonka & Nieminen, 2016b; Dhir, Kaur, Chen, & Lonka, 2016a; Kaur, Kaur, Chen & Rajala, 2016a; Kaur, Kaur, Chen & Rajala, 2016b). Therefore, there is a pressing need to address research on the cross-cultural differences in the relationship shared among educational affordances, the U&G of Facebook use and IFU (see Alhabash, Park, Kononova, Chian, & Wise, 2012) by recruiting Facebook users from lesser-studied cultural and demographic groups. The present study has

attempted to address the aforementioned open research gaps by investigating the empirical linkages among educational affordances, Facebook use and motives, and IFU among adolescent Facebook users from India. It has examined the adolescents' use of Facebook and their perceptions of its educational affordances, and which gratifications and educational affordances drive IFU among adolescents. A cross-sectional survey based study was administered with the participation of 942 adolescent Facebook users. The five main research questions of this study are: **RQ1**. What are the different sought educational affordances of Facebook use among adolescents? **RQ2**. What are the different sought Facebook U&G of adolescents? **RQ3**. How do different educational affordances of Facebook use among adolescents predict IFU? **RQ4**. How do the different Facebook U&G of adolescents predict IFU? **RQ5**. How do Facebook U&G and educational affordances of Facebook use among adolescents together predict IFU? The conclusions obtained from this investigation will help educators, scholars, and practitioners gain understanding of the different educational affordances and uses of SNS (e.g., Facebook) and of whether those affordances also drive intensive SNS use.

2. Background literature

2.1. Uses & gratifications (U&G)

U&G is a well-known theoretical framework that enables researchers and practitioners to understand why, how and when people tend to use a given medium or platform. The U&G framework emphasizes that media users are active and goal-oriented consumers since they tend to make deliberate choices concerning selecting a specific medium and using it for the satisfaction of their internal needs (Katz, 1959; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Several studies have suggested that the user's motives behind media use later predict the actual time spent on the medium (Katz, 1959; Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000; Swanson, 1979). Consequently, U&G theory could explain the different educational affordances and U&G sought by adolescent Facebook users and which of them translate into IFU. Due to this, the U&G framework was utilized to study the different educational affordances and U&G of Facebook among adolescents.

Several prior studies have examined the U&G of Facebook use in order to understand the different reasons for its use (Alhabash et al., 2012; Park & Lee, 2014). However, only a few of the prior studies have examined the different educational affordances of Facebook from the U&G perspective. To begin with, Mazman and Usluel (2010) carried out the first investigation and found three dimensions of the educational uses of Facebook, namely communication, collaboration and content/resource sharing. Similarly, Lamanauskas, Slekiene, and Raguliene (2012) found that university students tend to use Facebook for information sharing, content sharing (e.g., photos and videos) and learning new things, while Arteaga Sánchez et al. (2014) found that the educational use of Facebook is directly explained by the U&G of Facebook and indirectly by Facebook adoption. The most recent study by Balog, Pribeanu, and Ivan (2015) also found three main Facebook educational U&G among Romanian university students, namely communicating, keeping in touch with former schoolmates, and finding out what is going on in their university. However, most of these existing studies recruited university-level students, and are overly focused on communication and information seeking U&G, which are important, but other equally important educational affordances were ignored. To address this gap, the present study has prepared a comprehensive pool of items based on U&G theory in order to develop multi-factor instruments examining educational affordances and Facebook U&G.

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