Facebook Usage: A Study of Patronage Motivations of Students of The Christian Service University College, Kumasi – Ghana

Fortune Tella, Yarhands Dissou Arthur, Dennis Owusu Sarkodie and Asuamah Adade Yeboah

Department of Communication Studies, Christian Service University College, Kumasi

Abstract

This research sought to find out reasons for the use of Facebook by students of the Christian Service University College, Kumasi –Ghana. The study used the quantitative research approach to sample 380 undergraduate students from first to final year across all departments for the 2012/2013 academic year. The study's objective was to find out reasons that motivate students to use Facebook. The Uses and Gratifications theory was used to examine the motivations for Facebook usage by the students. The findings showed that the need to re-establish contact with old or existing friends is the strongest motivation and most important reason for the use of Facebook by majority of users. The need to engage in communication with friends fits in well with the socialisation concept of the uses and gratifications theory. The study's findings make clear that students' or adolescents' use of computer mediated communication is increasing in a fast-paced manner to the detriment of face-to-face communication. Facebook has become one of the mainstream social media and we expect the findings of this study to help tertiary education policy makers to be informed on how to use social media vehicles to enhance meaningful communication and interaction among tertiary students.

Introduction

The need to communicate and interact with others is important to every human being. Communication is an essential human need. Interactive communications through the use of computers have assumed currency. That is to say, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) technologies are increasingly being used by millions of people to communicate and interact and the dominant CMC tool of the 21st century is Social media.

According to Zakon (2005), the use of the E-mail kick-started the use of computer-based interpersonal communication. The first email, according to Zakon was sent in 1971 on the backbone of ARPANET (i.e. the original Internet) – the military project that first created an interconnectivity of computers. Herring (2004) stresses that the e-mail became the "default mode of CMC for many people".

Instant Messaging (IM), the next CMC tool to enable interpersonal interactions, allowed users to communicate with each other in one-on-one harmonised conversations. However, in the 90s "Chat rooms" became the dominant CMC technology. Chat rooms made it possible for multiple users to chat with one another in groups (Herring, 2004). Just like IM and unlike the e-mail, chat rooms made possible real-time text-based online conversations among users.

The CMC technologies of e-mail, IM and chat rooms created avenues for Internet enthusiasts to engage in social interactions.

The 21st century has witnessed advancement in CMC technologies. Social media as described by Aharony (2008) is "a web where digital tools allow users to create, change and publish dynamic content". According to Aharony, CMC technologies and applications ensure that social interactions and networking remain relevant and active among Internet users. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media "as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content."

There are numerous social networking sites (SNS) that have enhanced social media. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are popular SNS that enjoy good patronage because of the social networking and interaction benefits they provide. Available statistics show that information sent and exchanged on social media websites is burgeoning and in the billions. Over **30 billion** pieces of content (e.g. links, photos, notes) are shared each month on **Facebook** and **25 billion** tweets were sent in 2010 on **Twitter** (Royal Pingdom, 2011).

The researchers carried out the study on Facebook usage among university students because of its popularity with students. Research studies show that Facebook is the most patronised social networking site among university students (Hargittai, 2008; Jones & Fox, 2009; Matney & Borland, 2009).

Facebook has a subscriber base in excess of one billion (Facebook, 2014). Facebook's social networking features of connectedness, reach, interactivity, being community-driven, accessibility, usability and response time have ensured its massive patronage among university students. Students expect to have a sense of belonging and cohesion for a successful and proper functioning within a learning environment. Social media role in creating a sense of belonging and enabling social interaction should not be underestimated or trivialised.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to gather descriptive data on the use of Facebook by students of the Christian Service University College, Kumasi – Ghana. The data gathered was to help in understanding reasons why students use Facebook. The researchers also carried out the study to find out the dominant reason for the use of Facebook.

Studies are almost non-existent on the use of Facebook by students of tertiary institutions in Ghana. We believe the data generated out of this study will add significant information to the literature on the use of Facebook because accessing information from students will provide useful data on socialisation patterns and the relevance of interactivity in the lives of students.

Research Questions

The need to find out reasons for Facebook usage among students of the Christian Service University necessitated the need to conduct this study and hence the following research questions guided the research:

1. What factors motivate students to join Facebook?

2. What are the reasons for the current use of Facebook by students?

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to understand the reasons for the patronage of Facebook by students of the Christian Service University College (CSUC), Kumasi. Thus, the following objectives guided the conduct of the study:

1. To find out the factors that motivate students to join Facebook;

2. To find out the reasons for the current use of Facebook by students.

Scope of Study

The study was conducted on the campus of the Christian Service University College (CSUC), Kumasi – Ghana. At the time this study was conducted in the 2012/2013 academic year, CSUC run courses only at the undergraduate level. Business Administration, Theology, Computer Science and Communication Studies were the courses taught at the undergraduate level.

Literature Review

The overall theory governing this research is the "Uses and Gratifications" approach to communication effects. The Uses and Gratifications theory assumes that people are goal-oriented in their preferences for communication channels (Joinson, 2008). The uses and gratifications theory is valid for studying patronage motivations for media content because it focuses on determining the needs that are gratified using a particular medium. It focuses on what people do with the media, rather than on what the media do to people. The theory emphasises reasons for which audiences consume media.

Many researchers have applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory in mass media and communications research. Payne, Severn and Dozzier (1988) carried out research work on newspapers and magazines using the Theory. Rubin (1983) and Bantz (1982) applied the Theory in studies on television.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory in recent times has been applied to the study of the Internet (Rubin, 2002; Grant, 2005). Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) found out that "interpersonal utility" (socializing with others), "to pass time" (use the Internet when they are bored or to occupy time), "for information seeking", "because it is convenient", and "for entertainment" were the five main uses of the Internet identified by respondents. In the realm of social networking sites (SNS), Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009) used the Uses and Gratifications Theory in studying users of SNS. They found out that the gratification factors sought by users were: entertainment, information, socializing and self-status seeking. Entertainment and information-seeking gratification factors were found by LaRose and Eastin (2004) as the dominant reasons of respondents of their study for using SNSs.

Many SNSs researchers have fallen on the use of the uses and gratifications theory to explain the reasons for the patronage of SNSs by users especially university students.

Criticisms of Uses and Gratifications

Even though the uses and gratifications theory has been used in many traditional and new media studies, the theory has attracted some criticisms in its application. O'Donohoe (1994) concedes that the theory has been criticised based on the perception that it more often than not generates reasons as to the attendance to the media by audiences. Another criticism of the theory is the theory's presupposition of an active audience who accords full attention to the media which according to them is not always the case (Lometti, Reeves and Bybee, 1977).

A very common and discussed criticism is the lull in uses and gratifications (U and G) research in discerning between "Gratifications sought" (GS) and "Gratifications obtained" (GO) (Ruggiero, 2000; Palmgreen, Wenner and Rayburn 1981).

Despite these criticisms, Rubin (2002) and Ruggiero (2000) stress that new media forms, particularly the Internet have revived the U and G theory. According to them, the nature of the Internet – its interactive nature, lends itself to the application of U and G in studying Internet usage.

Dicken-Garcia (1998) argues strongly for the Internet by stating that the Internet places stronger emphasis on informal, interpersonal conversation than has been true of earlier media. A notable and novel characteristic of Internet audience behaviour according to Dicken-Garcia lies in the phenomenon that users communicate electronically what they might never say in person or on the phone.

Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) assert that the Internet can be considered as an area for mass communication and social science research especially in the way mass communication audiences use it and hence the U and G theory can be applied in studying the Internet. Eighmey and McCord (1998) used U and G theory to find out web sites experiences of users. Dunne, Lawlor & Rowley (2010) state clearly that "the Internet and more specifically SNS, constitute newer media formats, with their own defining characteristics, which are ripe for examination under the theoretical lens of U and G theory." Ruggiero sums up the defence for the use of U and G in Internet usage studies by stressing that "Interpretation of the individual's response by researchers has shifted from the sender to the receiver, from the media to the audience. The primary unit of data collection of U and G continues be (sic) the individual..."

The researchers support the use of U and G in studying usage of SNS by Internet users. The researchers used the theory in finding out factors motivating students of the Christian Service University College, Kumasi to join Facebook and reasons for their continued patronage. Specifically, the researchers focused on gratifications sought on Facebook. Thus, the study relied on the following gratifications as the framework in studying the patronage of Facebook by these students:

Socialization – One critical reason for a number of people to subscribe to social network platforms is the need to meet people, exchange ideas, build friendships and enter into romantic relationships. Available literature on Facebook usage shows that majority of users are more on Facebook to communicate with people they have existing relationships

with friends than for establishing new online relationships (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe,2007; Ellison, Heino & Gibbs, 2006).

A survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011) revealed that of the over 2,200 participants in a survey, more than a half (67 percent) of respondents indicated that they patronised SNS because they wanted to stay in touch with friends. Other reasons included "making new friends" which was indicated by nine percent of respondents and three percent used SNS because of romantic reasons. Ellison et al's (2007) study of 286 students of Michigan State University revealed that the use of Facebook was associated with bridging, bonding and maintaining already established relationships. A study by Sheldon (2008) titled "The relationship between unwillingness to communicate and students' Facebook use" revealed that the socialization reason of "to communicate with friends" with a primary factor loading of 0.83 was stated by majority of student respondents as the motivating factor for joining Facebook. The conclusion of the study's findings was that majority of students went to Facebook for the maintenance of relationships they had with people they knew or were familiar with.

In a survey study by Folaranmi (2013) on Facebook addiction level among undergraduates in Nigerian universities, majority of students (22.1%) of a sample size of 994 stated that the socialization factor of meeting people was the activity that they engaged in on Facebook.

The preference for socialization as the major reason for Facebook use is the outcome in most Facebook studies. According to findings coming out of the study of Vitak (2008), 85% of respondents said that keeping in touch with friends was the most important reason for using Facebook. Vitak's explanation for this outcome is that Facebook offers many interactive features and these features do get people to socialise in numerous ways.

Thus, socialization among users plays an important role for the increasing patronization and use of SNSs, particularly, Facebook. It is an important gratification sought after by users.

Information – Information is one of the important reasons for people attending to the media. In SNS usage, studies have revealed that information, as a gratification is a reason for the use of SNSs. Users of

Facebook search for information about on-campus and off-campus activities, political and civic issues (Park et al., 2009). In a study by Ancu and Cozma (2009) on political gratifications sought and obtained on SNSs, they found out that 67 percent users of MySpace used the website because it was a platform that enabled interaction between users and a presidential candidate and other supporters of a political party.

Users want to be informed about happenings within their environment and hence seek information from friends, networks or groups formed on the Internet. One interesting development on SNSs platforms is the creation and maintenance by media organisations and political groups of Facebook pages and presence. These pages allow users to seek for information and contribute to discussions real-time. Users who seek for information gratification use Facebook and other SNS because of information reasons.

Entertainment – One of the gratifications contained in U and G theory is entertainment. The theory makes it clear that people attend to the media because they want to be entertained. Social networking sites also provide an avenue for users to be entertained. According to Park et al (2009), users patronized SNS because they want entertainment specifically, to satisfy leisure and amusement needs. Thus, for some users they will use SNS because it will provide them entertainment gratifications.

Self-Status Seeking – Some users patronize SNS because of how they want to be seen or perceived by others. Some users use their "walls" as a tool to show how caring, good-mannered, political, social and friendly they are. Personal status is also a desired gratification sought by some users. Park et al (2009) indicated that users actively seek out personal statuses through SNSs. Tufecki (2008) outlines some elements of how some users want to be perceived: friendship and social ties, demographics and location, privacy, and social grooming. These elements allow users of SNSs to interact and maintain a presence that allow them to be liked and accepted. This gratification is a reason for the use of SNSs by some users.

Facebook as a tool for re-establishing off-line friendships online

Facebook users create accounts on Facebook in order to communicate with existing friends. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) assert that

social network sites (SNSs) support the maintenance of existing social ties and the formation of social ties. The idea of bonding in friendships and family relationships is natural and the birth of social media has enhanced activities associated with relationship bonding. As pointed out by Vitak, Ellison and Steinfield (2011), Facebook has a number of features that support the maintenance of behaviours friends and family display. Features such as posting messages on 'walls', chatting, posting pictures among others support offline activities such as picture exchange, chatting on the phone, display of affection on special events etc. of friends. Ellison et al (2011) assert that these features of Facebook may be helpful in providing individuals some forms of support such as advice and consequently facilitate the exchange of emotional support between users or friends.

As it is with off-line relationships, online relationships on platforms such as Facebook facilitate what Wellman et al (1996) categorize as strong and weak ties. In off-line relationships, we develop strong ties with close friends and family and weak ties with acquaintances. Granovetter (1973) cited by Vitak (2008) state that two individuals who have strong ties share a lot in common than two individuals who have weak ties.

As pointed out earlier, the Internet through tools such as social media facilitates connections and provides users with alternative means to connect with others who share their interests or relational goals (Ellison et al, 2006; Horrigan, 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996). Ellison points out that these connections are likely to result in an increase in social capital.

The need to maintain off-line relationships in online settings shows the importance people attach to off-line relationships. Ellison et al (2011) point out that research has shown that where individuals interact through both mediated and face-to-face platforms relationships have been enhanced because verbal and non-verbal communication behaviours are fully utilized. Ellison et al (2011) state that Facebook provides multiple ways of affecting the way individuals perceive their bonding social capital. According to them, Facebook "serves as a social lubricant, enabling individuals to share personal information and easily communicate with one another, thus supporting relational maintenance and feelings of closeness."

Method

Overview

The question of finding out why students of CSUC use Facebook and factors motivating their continued usage demanded for the researchers to collect data from undergraduate students pursuing courses in Business Administration, Communication Studies, Theology and Computer Science. These were the main courses offered by CSUC in the 2012/2013 academic year. The descriptive research design was used to conduct the study in order to collect quantitative data that describes why students of CSUC use Facebook. As such, the survey method was employed to sample from the student population of CSUC.

Participants

The student population for the 2012/2013 academic year accessed from the Academic office of CSUC was 1,695. With a confidence interval of 4.28 and a confidence level of 95%, the researchers assessed a sample size of 400 students. Of the 400 students sampled for the study, 64% were from the Business Administration Department; 24% from the Communication Studies Department; 11% from Theology Department and one percent from the Computer Science Department. These outcomes match up to the actual share of students pursuing these courses. For the 2012/2013 academic year, Business administration students constituted 74.2% of the total student population; Communication Studies students were 15.6%, Theology students were 6.4% and students pursuing Computer Science constituted 3.1%.

Students were selected through the processes of stratification and systematic random sampling. Stratification was first done on the courses so that each course formed a stratum. Thus, four strata were created and the systematic random sampling was conducted on each stratum in selecting 400 respondents for the study. Of the 400 students selected for the research, 380 students returned their questionnaires.

Table 1: *Academic programme of respondents*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Business Administration	256	64
Communication studies	96	24
Theology	44	11
Computer science	4	1
Total	400	100

Instrument

A questionnaire made up of 42 question items was used as the data collection instrument with sections for demographic information of respondents which included age, gender, year in school and academic programme; Facebook usage patterns including time spent on Facebook; respondents' relationship status which included the number of friends a respondent had on Facebook; dichotomous response format and rank ordering format of 'least important', 'less important', 'important', 'more important', and 'most important' scored from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important)

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed and commented upon using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which helped in generating percentages, frequencies, tables and graphs.

Results

The study set out to find out the factors motivating students to join Facebook and reasons for their current use of Facebook. Participants of this study as already stated were drawn from all

year levels pursuing courses in Business administration, Communication studies, Theology and Computer Science. The demographic profile of respondents is presented in the table 2:

Respondents' age

From the findings, respondents within the age bracket of 22 and 25 constituted the highest number with 30.5%. Collectively, respondents aged between 22 and 29 made up 60.5% of respondents. It is clear from this finding that the most active users of Facebook for this study are students who fall into the age bracket of 22 and 29. This implies that most of the students of CSUC who are on Facebook are in their 20s and they constitute an active and mature group for the promotion of effective interactions and socializations on the CSUC campus.

Table 2: *Respondents' age*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 21	42	11.1
22 – 25	116	30.5
26 – 29	114	30
30 and above	108	28.4
Total	380	100

Respondents' gender

Male respondents made up 55.8% as against 44.2% female respondents. This outcome is similar to the CSUC student statistical figures for the 2012/2013 academic year. Whereas the male population was 56.2% of the student population, the female population was 43.8%. This aspect of the study did not set out to find out gender differences in relation to reasons or motivations for Facebook usage. The conclusion for this finding is that there were more males than females who used Facebook on the CSUC campus. A positive aspect of this finding is that both the male and female numbers are encouraging and as a result targeted information from CSUC to these genders is likely to be patronized.

Table 3: *Respondents gender*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Male	212	55.8
Female	168	44.2
Total	380	100

Number of years on Facebook

Majority of respondents representing close to a half (42.9%) have been on Facebook between three and four years. A consequence of this majority outcome is that the students surveyed for this study are familiar with Facebook and it has been part of their socialization and interaction experiences over a period of time. Less than a twentieth (4.2%) of respondents have been early participants on Facebook. Though this group of respondents is a minority, it will not be out of place to describe them as 'early adopters' of an innovation as theorized by Everett Rogers if examined against the 2004 year Facebook was established.

Table 4: *Number of years on Facebook*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1 – 2 years	150	39.5
3 – 4 years	163	42.9
5 – 6 years	51	13.4
7 – 8 years	16	4.2
Total	380	100

Time spent on Facebook on a daily basis

Less than a half (42.1%) of respondents indicated that they spend less than thirty minutes daily on Facebook. This group of respondents represents the majority and this outcome shows that their usage of Facebook is not intense and could be described as mild. In an academic environment where the overall objective is to study and pass well in examinations, it is encouraging that only a minority (10.5%) of students surveyed indicated that they spent between two hours and above on Facebook.

Table 5: *Time spent on Facebook on a daily basis*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 30 minutes	160	42.1
30 – 60 minutes	112	29.5
60 – 90 minutes	26	6.8
Two hours	35	9.2
Above two hours	5	1.3
Total	380	100

Friends on Facebook

Facebook enables users to make friends online. A user has to have friends in order to use Facebook and engage in interactions. Majority of respondents (32.6%) indicated that they have between 1 and 150 friends. A significant number of respondents (31%) indicated that they have more than 500 friends. These outcomes make it possible for respondents to have a wider network of users that they can interconnect with. Thus, opportunities for social interactions, entertainment, relief of boredom and self-identification are better enhanced for a user particular about social networking.

Table 6: *Friends on Facebook*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1 – 150	124	32.6
150 – 300	79	20.8
300 – 500	57	15
More than 500	119	31.4
Total	380	100

Having a Facebook account before entering CSUC

An overwhelming majority of respondents (79.5%) have been active on Facebook before enrolling at CSUC. The responses given by less than a quarter (20.5%) of respondents suggest that they only started using

Facebook when they enrolled at CSUC. The implication is that Facebook is a popular tool for initiating friendship, networking and socialisation for both prospective and enrolled students. The implication of this finding is that Facebook presents good marketing and advertising opportunities to CSUC in reaching out to prospective students to enrol and to these admitted to pursue academic programmes in the University College.

Table 7: *Having a Facebook account before entering CSUC*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	302	79.5
No	78	20.5
Total	380	100

Facebook friends made at CSUC

The Facebook platform has enabled surveyed students to establish friendships with other students on the CSUC campus. This development is good especially in a university environment where social interactions can facilitate a sense of belonging. Having a circle of student 'Facebook' friends on the same campus can help students to share ideas and knowledge on topics taught in class, student issues and academic information. As shown on Table 8, respondents representing more than four-fifth (96.5%) have between 1 and 80 friends from CSUC. The CSUC authorities can take a lead role of encouraging student associations to get students to form a variety of groups on and off campus that will champion important issues and activities such as examination malpractices, mentoring, volunteerism and plagiarism. The formation of such groups on Facebook will help fast-track the process of garnering strong support from users in ensuring the implementation of issues that will bring about development of the student body.

Table 8: *Facebook friends made at CSUC*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1 – 20	246	64.7
20 – 40	66	17.4
40 – 60	28	7.4
60 – 80	23	6.0
Above 80	17	4.5
Total	380	100

Motivation for joining Facebook

One of the objectives for embarking on this research was to find out the motivations for respondents joining Facebook. This aspect of the study was also to assess the uses and gratifications theory on why people attend to media content.

In order to assess this objective, the researchers employed the use of a rank ordering approach to find out which motivation variable was the most important and which one was the least important. Hence, *respondents were required to rank motivation variables from least to most important with '1' for 'least important'; '2' for 'less important'; '3' for 'important'; '4' for 'more important' and '5' for 'most important'.*

We used the Relative importance index to score the motivation variables. The Relative importance index helps to arrange in order of importance manifest variables in key constructs. With a relative importance index of 0.769, the motivation variable that scored highest with respondents was 'to establish contact with old or existing friends'. It can thus be considered as the most important motivation for respondents joining Facebook. It is fair to assume that a lot of users of Facebook want to reconnect online with friends they already know but might have lost contact with. Demographics details on Facebook such as 'schools attended' help users to reconnect with classmates who they might have not heard from in years. At the relative importance index of 0.742, the next most important motivation for respondents joining Facebook is 'to search for information'. This outcome is significant. As pointed out by Park et al (2009), Facebook users search for information about

on-campus and off-campus activities. The same thing can be said for respondents of this study. Users who want information gratification look forward to being informed about happenings within their environment. The variables with the least scores are: 'to chat with someone I share a love relationship with' (0.471), 'to advertise/market a business' (0.576) and 'to make new friends' (0.579). The majority outcome implies that Facebook will always be popular with users because of its ability to enable users re-establish contact with people they have not been in contact with for some time. It will always be an attractive medium and hence in an academic environment such as CSUC, the authorities can use it to re-establish contact with its alumni and get them involved in activities that can lead to achievement of set objectives.

Table 9: *Motivation for joining Facebook*

Manifest Variables	Relative Importance Index
To reestablish contact with old/existing friends	0.769230769
To search for information	0.742120344
To be relieved of boredom	0.676744186
To be entertained/have fun	0.661627907
To interact with people with common interests	0.644837758
To promote a cause	0.603508772
To express care	0.595930233
To make new friends	0.579310345
To advertise/market a business	0.576162791
To chat with someone I share a love relationship with	0.471005917
Other factors	0.323380282

RII chart on Motivation in the use of facebook
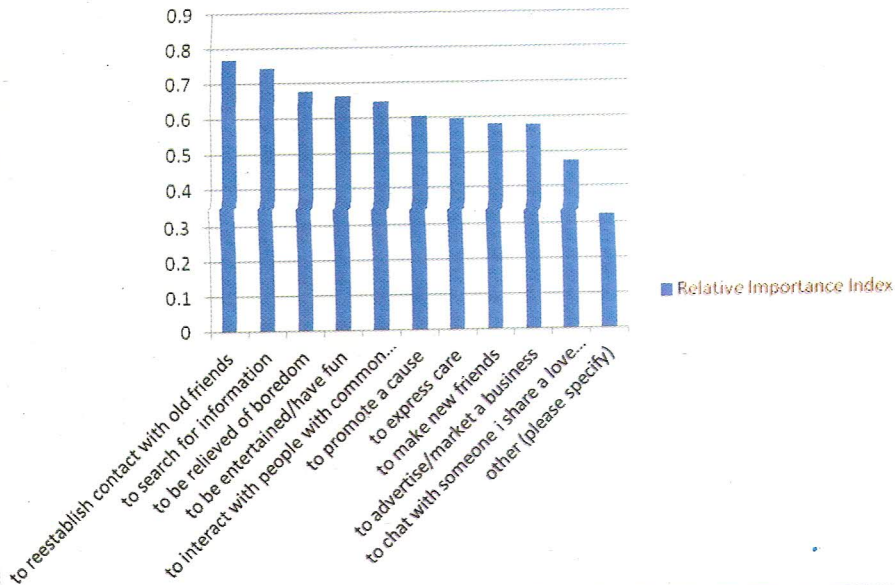
Fig 1: *Motivation for joining Facebook*

Reasons for current use of Facebook

The second objective was to find out the reasons for respondents' current use of Facebook. It was important to find out if the motivation for joining Facebook manifests in a respondents' current use of Facebook. It was necessary to check if a respondent who joined Facebook for purposes of re-establishing contact with friends will still use Facebook for that same reason. This aspect of the study was also to assess the uses and gratifications theory.

In this aspect of the study, the researchers employed the use of a rank ordering approach to find out which reason variable was the most important and which one was the least important. Respondents were required to rank 'reason' variables from least to most important with '1' for 'least important'; '2' for 'less important'; '3' for 'important'; '4' for 'more important' and '5' for 'most important'. With the highest relative importance index score of 0.781, 'to re-establish contact with old/ existing friends' was the most important reason for respondents' current use of Facebook. There was no change in respondents' responses to the most important variable in motivation for using Facebook and reason

for current usage. Thus, the fact established is that for some respondents the motivation for joining Facebook is still the same reason for their current use of Facebook. The reason 'to search for information' scored 0.767 to emerge the next most important reason for respondents' use of Facebook. There is no change in the order of importance for both motivation for joining Facebook and reasons for current usage. Thus, for most respondents the motivation for joining Facebook is also the reason for their current usage.

Table 10: *Reasons for current use of Facebook*

| Manifest Variables	Relative Importance Index
To reestablish contact with old/existing friends	0.781769437
To search for information	0.767934783
To be entertained/have fun	0.687671233
To be relieved of boredom	0.661495845
To interact with people with common interests	0.653781513
To express care	0.624657534
To promote a cause	0.586666667
To make new friends	0.58547486
To advertise/market a business	0.585205479
To chat with someone I share a love relationship with	0.546111111
Others	0.44109589
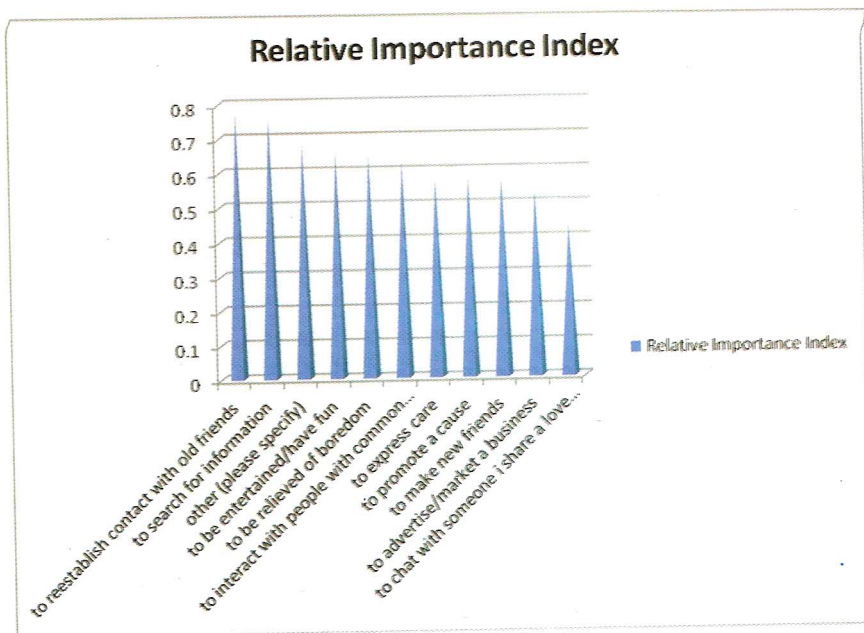
Fig 2: *Reasons for current use of Facebook*

Establishing offline friendships with online friends

Majority of respondents representing more than half (50.8%) indicated that using Facebook has enabled them to establish offline friendships with people or users they met on Facebook (i.e. online friends). Other respondents representing close to a half (49.2%) indicated that they have not established offline friendships with Facebook friends. These two outcomes are quite significant. Facebook engenders social interactions online. If a user goes beyond having an online friendship and establishes offline friendships with online friends, it seems to suggest that some element of trust is created between the user and online friends. The assumption is that majority of respondents see Facebook as a tool that can create offline friendships. Thus, people who have challenges starting friendships can use Facebook as a platform first to make online friends and then graduate these online friendships into offline friendships. For the other respondents who do not go to the next step of making online friends offline friends, the assumption is that they want their online presence and interactions to remain online. Creating friendships is an important and delicate human endeavour. People build friendships on trust and having to establish offline friendships with online friends can

be a challenging exercise. That perhaps explains the outcome of the responses given by the respondents.

Table 11: *Establishing offline friendships with online friends*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	193	50.8
No	187	49.2
Total	380	100

Facebook as a tool for ideas exchange among CSUC students

One strong feature of Facebook is the promotion of interaction which encourages ideas exchange. More than a half (59.5%) of respondents use Facebook as a tool for exchanging ideas with other students. Students are likely to discuss topics taught in class, assignments, school projects etc. With the instant nature of Facebook, a better way of interacting for purposes of ideas exchange could be why majority of respondents go on Facebook. Close to a half (40.5%) of respondents do not use Facebook as a tool for exchanging ideas. The implication of this finding is that the authorities of CSUC can adopt or promote the use of Facebook more formally such as creating Facebook presence or integrating it in ways for more interactions among students. Such a presence would involve the authorities generating topics related to academic life and activities and calling on students to exchange ideas on such a platform.

Table 12: *Facebook as a tool for ideas exchange amongst CSUC students*

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	226	59.5
No	154	40.5
Total	380	100

Discussions

This study set out to find out factors that motivated students of CSUC to join Facebook and reasons for their current usage of Facebook. Results show that respondents joined Facebook and currently patronize

Facebook because of the need to re-establish or reconnect with old friends or existing friends.

Facebook as per its features ensures that users engage in some form of interactions. For such interactions to be active, it is important for users to have friends. Just like in any human relationship, the more friends and acquaintances an individual has, the more active he/she is in interactions and socializations. From the findings, the number of friends of the majority of respondents was between 1 and 150. This outcome echoes the research work of Golder, Wilkinson and Huberman (2005) who found out that the means of friends per user of Facebook is 144. Even though this number of friends that majority of respondents have is good for interaction and socialization purposes, it is important to point out that a drawback to such number of friends could be too much time spent on Facebook which can affect a student's devotion to studies. Also, the ability of having so many friends on Facebook can limit a user's ability to have quality interactions. If a user is limited to a small number of friends, it is possible for a user to have quality and meaningful interactions with friends than if he is not limited.

One significant finding of our research is the number of years respondents have been on Facebook. Majority of respondents have been using Facebook for more than three years. Academic programmes run at CSUC last four years. The assumption is that some respondents in the majority group joined Facebook before they entered CSUC. Others joined when they enrolled at CSUC. For those who joined Facebook before entering CSUC, the motivation to join could have been facilitated by peer pressure. The motivation for those who joined when they enrolled could have been facilitated by the popularity of Facebook usage among their fellow students. It is clear that the majority of respondents realised quite early the potential of Facebook in facilitating interaction and for those who adopted it when they enrolled at CSUC, they welcomed the potential of Facebook in creating a sense of belongingness on the university campus.

We also found out that the time spent daily on Facebook by majority of respondents was less than 30 minutes. This outcome corresponds with the study done by Vitak (2008) who found out that 95% of respondents spend 30 minutes or less on Facebook. It is quite encouraging that a

significant majority of student respondents do not spend countless hours on Facebook since doing so can make them spend less time on their books. It can be assumed that these students value the reason why they are students of CSUC. If majority of respondents were to spend two hours or more daily on Facebook, it will be quite worrisome and could affect the number of hours spent on studying. Another dimension to spending less time on Facebook by majority of respondents is that their use of Facebook is measured. It is possible that these respondents pay more attention to other activities that enhance their daily existence as students. The researchers are of the view that while it is important for students to interact on Facebook, it is imperative that students use Facebook qualitatively and meaningfully. A critical component of using Facebook in a meaningful and qualitative way is time. Research has shown that if Facebook is used in an addictive manner, it can have serious consequences.

Majority of respondents reported of making a maximum of 20 friends who are students on the CSUC campus. Facebook has features that allow the formation of groups. Currently, there are many CSUC groups such as 'The Communicators – Class of 2012', 'CSUC Alumni', 'Business Students Association Alumni – CSUC' and 'Notice Board – CSUC BBA L300'. These groups are platforms that enable students to comment on a variety of issues that affect them on and off campus. These groups also afford students opportunities to know each other thereby creating a sense of belongingness and family. The opportunity of making or starting friendships through the medium of Facebook presents to students networking opportunities in and off campus. With majority of respondents having a circle of 20 friends on campus, interactivity among the respondents and their friends will be enhanced. It can be assumed that Facebook is enabling meaningful friendships.

As is the case for previous Facebook studies, majority of respondents fully endorsed 'to re-establish contact with old or existing friends' factor as the motivation and reason for joining Facebook (Ellison et al, 2007; Vitak, 2008). This finding is indicative that the need to interact and communicate with offline friends and acquaintances is the reason for joining and using Facebook for majority of respondents. When two people engage in face-to-face interactions, they talk about a variety of issues that affect both of them. Face-to-face interaction is not always

possible. The Facebook platform fills the gap of ensuring that when face-to-face interactions are not always possible, friends can always engage in interactions. It is a welcoming outcome for this research that majority participants of this research want to re-establish contact with existing friends. The opportunity to reconnect will make it possible for them to restart face-to-face conversations, get updated on current happenings in the friendship, exchange ideas and socialize. Thus, in situations where friendships might have gone latent or inactive as a result of relocation or migration, friends can through Facebook make friendships active and relevant to realise socialization obligations.

It is quite significant that respondents scored information search high as the reason for attending to Facebook. It is to be expected that students pursuing different academic programmes on the CSUC campus, would search for information on happenings on and off campus, politics, entertainment etc. Facebook, made for social interactions, is now a source of information on issues such as politics, entertainment, relationship and sports. Information search on the Internet on these issues was the preserve of Internet search sites such as *Yahoo*, *Google* and *MSN*.

The study's findings also revealed that the 'make new friends' reason for Facebook usage is not considered important by respondents. The score given it by respondents seem to suggest that majority of respondents are more interested in linking up with existing friends and acquaintances. Ellison et al (2007) point out that Facebook is used more for interaction and communication among offline friends and acquaintances than it is used for connecting with strangers. This outcome is consistent with other findings on Facebook usage (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000).

We also found that the need to transform or concretise online friendships into offline friendships is an action majority of respondents take. Even though the difference between those who transform and those who do not transform online friendships into offline ones is not that significant, the outcome is quite interesting. As pointed out by Blieszner and Adams (1992) and cited by Kapp (2011) friendships are the most important type of relationships and according to Burleson and Samter (1994) and cited by Kapp (2011) a friendship helps one in acquiring skills, providing a sense of support, companionship, affiliation, connectedness among

others. It stands to reason that if an online friendship or relationship provides these benefits, it will be quite easy for users to transform or concretize it into offline friendships or relationships.

A very important outcome of the research is the overwhelming endorsement majority of respondents gave Facebook in the strengthening of their offline relationships. A relationship is strengthened through expressions of care, love, companionship and connectedness. Facebook features such as birthday reminders, sending of birthday gifts, exchange of pictures and invitations to attend events, allow users to bond and socialise. This finding is consistent with Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza (2008) finding which showed a significant number of SNS users stated that using SNS brought them closer to friends.

The study also revealed that majority of students of CSUC who participated in this study use Facebook as a tool for exchanging ideas. Since Facebook is a social interaction platform, it is built to engender the exchange of ideas. Students are able to access Facebook on mobile phones, tablets and laptops, opportunities for ideas exchange on lectures, research, activities on campus and assignments. This is a progressive development since it ensures that many students will always know what is happening around them. With access to Facebook, the average student will not be limited to exchange ideas only through the medium of face-to-face interaction. The user who is uncomfortable in engaging in face-to-face interactions has Facebook to fall on in engaging in exchange of ideas. In a sense, Facebook has broken the barrier of not being able to communicate. It is important for students in a university to have access to a tool that facilitates interaction.

One worthy outcome of the study is the marketing and advertising opportunities Facebook presents to CSUC. A majority of respondents indicated that they had Facebook account before they entered CSUC. The implication is that prospective students who have Facebook accounts can be targeted on Facebook with information and messages to enrol at CSUC.

Limitations

The major limitation to this study is that the study was conducted in a private Christian university college and hence the study's findings cannot be used to generalise usage of Facebook by a typical student in a private university college in Ghana who uses Facebook. The study is also limited in its approach to gender responses. It would have been quite revealing to compare and contrast reasons given by male and female respondents for using Facebook. Any future study will explore gender motivations for Facebook usage. Outcomes of such an approach will make clear which reasons are consistent with female and male usage of Facebook. The study is limited in generalising that the need to re-establish contact with existing friends scored highest with students pursuing Business Administration, Communication Studies, Computer Science and Theology. The study did not also take into account the contribution of respondents' ages in determining reasons for the use of Facebook. The study is limited in its approach in examining the various gratifications of socialization, information, entertainment and self-status seeking. Each gratification could have been examined separately to find out the levels or types of satisfaction each gratification provides

Future research on Facebook usage could compare and contrast private and public university students' usage of Facebook. In addition, a gender assessment of Facebook usage can be examined. Other aspects of Facebook usage as regards the effects, dangers and types of friendship can be studied. Future studies can be longitudinal and more exploratory to better understand the Facebook phenomenon.

Conclusions

The findings of this study make clear that re-establishing contact with existing friends is an important reason for Facebook usage. Students in a university have formed offline friendships from their time in junior and senior high schools and at home. The motivation to reconnect with these friends is strong and if a platform such as Facebook can make it possible, they will join and start interacting with these friends.

Facebook supports the strengthening of friendships by enabling connectedness, companionship and show of love and care. Thus, for

majority of respondents of this study, the socialization gratification of the uses and gratifications theory is enabled and enhanced on Facebook.

Access to information on issues such as politics, research, entertainment and academic projects is supported on the Facebook platform. This is made possible through friends and applications on Facebook. A student thus has access to be informed and also to inform. The information gratification of the uses and gratifications theory is also made possible by Facebook for the majority of respondents for this study.

It is gratifying to know that majority of students do not spend a lot of time on Facebook. It is fair to assume that these students can effectively balance their studies with their usage of Facebook.

The researchers expect the outcome of this research to help policy makers and educational institution managers gain an understanding of how best they can use Facebook in creating meaningful relationships, networks and promoting interest in the activities and services offered by educational institutions. We also expect the results of the study to help tertiary education policy makers be informed on how to use social media vehicles to enhance communication and interaction among students of tertiary institutions. Also, we hope that the results of this study will encourage tertiary institutions in Ghana that are not abreast with the benefits that Facebook provides, to look for ways of promoting its use on their websites and explore ways of using its interactive features in creating a sense of belonging on campus for students.

Overall and with the study's findings, Facebook is enhancing the socialisation and interaction among students of the Christian Service University College selected for this research. Thus, these students attend to Facebook because they would obtain some gratifications.

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