Different usage of Facebook among age groups

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Dated: January 11, 2017

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Writing this paper in the study of
Scientific Method: Theory and Application.

Abstract

Facebook is the largest social media platform with its 1.18 billion users (Facebook, 2016). Among this enormous group of people there are of course many different perceptions regarding the use of Facebook. In this paper different age groups will be compared to see what they think of Facebook and the use of it, using data from my previous paper ”Perception of Facebook among age groups”. The overall perception Facebook has shown to be that it is entertaining and a platform for advertising. Regarding the use of Facebook the primary use of Facebook has proven to be as a way of passing time and to keep in touch with existing friends.

Keywords

Facebook, social media, perception, advertising, entertainment, privacy

Introduction

"Founded in 2004, Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.” (Facebook, 2016, http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/).

Facebook is a company which, as stated, was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and some of his friends from Harvard College. In the beginning it was open only for college students but as of 2006 it is open to anyone who is thirteen or older. Facebook is an online social media and social
networking service (Wikipedia 2016). Being a social media means it allows its users to communicate directly to each other on the internet. (Nationalencyklopedin, 2016).

"We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.” (Boyd, Ellison, 2008, p. 211)

According to Facebook there are, as of September 2016, 1.18 billion Facebook-users each month on average (Facebook, 2016). There are users online who say they are concerned about privacy when using social media platforms like Facebook (Golbeck & Mauriello, 2016).

Method

This paper will show and discuss how people in various age-groups are using Facebook. The facts will be based on both primary and secondary sources using scientific articles, papers and a survey. The empirical data will be collected from my previous paper regarding people’s perception of Facebook and the survey has been made, asking 224 persons about their perceptions and usage of Facebook through questions with both multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey was created with Google Forms and posted on Facebook, simply to access users. These different sources will be compared and used to find out what different perceptions of Facebook there are among people.

Empirical evidence

Facebook is the largest social network when looking at young people (Yang & Brown, 2013). One group of users on Facebook are students. There are several studies discussing why they are using Facebook. Some reasons are; to maintain existing relationships, to meet new people, because Facebook is cool, to increase popularity, to pass time, to express or present oneself, to learn, as a task management tool and also for activism. The main reason does however seem to be the first one mentioned above, to maintain existing relationships. (O’Bannon, Beard & Britt, 2013). Also Yang &
Brown means that students mainly use Facebook to maintain current social ties rather than searching for new relations. They also mean that Facebook is a tool to stay in touch with friends you don't meet very often (Yang & Brown, 2013).

When comparing adolescents and adults in a previous article you can tell that teenagers are more likely to disclose their private information than adults. Even if the teenagers are more open to share their information widely there are a positive correlation between time spent on Facebook and disclosure regarding personal information. The same article also says adolescents are using Facebook to a larger extent than adults which is one explanation to their usage of privacy settings. When on the other hand analyzing the need for popularity there are no significant differences between the two groups of teenagers and adults. Christofides, Muise & Desmarais have a conclusion which says there are more similarities than differences when comparing adolescents and adults regarding the information sharing, how that information is being shared and to what people it is being shared. (Christofides, Muise & Desmarais, 2012).

Katherine K. Roberts has written an article about Facebook where she looked at privacy and perceptions when it comes to advertising. According to Roberts a very big part of college students (of the colleges she analyzed) who are using Facebook are aware of their privacy settings. More than 80 percent claims their privacy is either "strict" or "very strict". That means their private information can only be seen by their friends and they are only searchable among other users. When using Facebook you do come across advertising anyway and Roberts mean that slightly more than half of the questioned students don't change their perception of privacy even though they are exposed to advertising. However there are some students who change perceptions about a certain company and sees them differently. Roberts mean that they feel that the specific company may appear as, manipulative, smart, less credible, desperate, etcetera. The same article also says that the majority of the questioned college students log-on to their account daily and that they are well aware about advertising on their Facebook-profile. When studying how these users want Facebook to change there are less than 30 percent who suggest that Facebook stops using commercial and advertising completely. (Roberts 2010). According to Johnston, Chen and Hauman students are in fact very positive to Facebook and its existence, so much as they would be sad if Facebook were to shut down.
Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes claims that even though people change their privacy settings to "friends-only" you are sharing a lot of, or most of your information. The also say that users of Facebook doesn’t seem to realize this and that they are sharing this information unwillingly. (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes, 2009).

According to Deng & Tavares students are using Facebook and sees it as a combination of both socializing and learning functions within the school. Students mean that Facebook ”is a valuable platform for sharing information, exchanging experiences and teaching ideas, discussing various academic and social issues, as well as seeking help and support during their TP. It appeared to be natural for them to create posts, share information and conduct online discussions on Facebook.” (Deng & Tavares, 2013. p. 173).

Another article looking at students and Facebook is one by Fogel & Nehmad. According to them men are taking greater risks than women on Facebook, in form of disclosing information and posting information about themselves on their profiles. They also claim that this is a behavior that appears in other situations as well since men are more willingly to take risks than women. In line with the risk taking part women are also more concerned about their privacy than men when using social medias like Facebook. When looking at people in general you can also tell that people with a profile on a social network or media like Facebook has a greater level of risk taking than people who don't use sites like Facebook. Another general thing is that according to Fogel & Nehmad people in their study has the overall perception of Facebook as a trustworthy social media. (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009)

The following information has been collected using a survey, asking people about their perceptions of Facebook. The age groups showed below has been used and the diagram shows the allocation between men and women, participating in the survey.

When looking at the reasons why people use Facebook it shows that almost everyone uses Facebook as a way of passing time. In addition to passing time all different age groups are quite similar when looking at their responses. Facebook is used to; find events (33%), look at videos (31%), create events (28%), find and share information (23%), find groups for one's interests (18%) and to find old classmates (18%). (Multiple answers allowed).
The different perceptions of Facebook varies some among age groups. However a wide perception is that Facebook is an entertaining site and thereafter people sees it as an advertising channel.

The age group, 11-20 think that Facebook can be both positive and negative. Along with that they think, like mentioned earlier, it is entertaining. However they also find Facebook exposing and some also mention that it is a place for bullying and spreading reputations.
Different usage of Facebook among age groups

In the age group 21-30 more people are saying that Facebook is uninteresting when comparing to other age groups but most of them do think it can be entertaining. Even though some answer that it is uninteresting there is still a majority that say it is an interesting platform relative to uninteresting. Many also mention that they think it is a platform for advertising just like other groups say. There are a few saying that their perception of Facebook is overall negative and even that it is boring. This is not a majority but in this age group these are more commonly used answers than among the younger.

People between 31-40 still thinks that Facebook is entertaining and almost everyone say they connect Facebook to advertising. There are more people saying that it is uninteresting than interesting and they also have both negative and positive things to connect to Facebook.
Different usage of Facebook among age groups

The age group 41-50 agrees with the other groups on the fact that Facebook is entertaining but they do however in a greater occurrence say it is uninteresting, negative, exposing and also that it is a place for bullying and a place for spreading reputations.
Different usage of Facebook among age groups

When looking at the older age groups being 51-60 and 61- you can tell that these groups in a greater occurrence agrees to the previous age group (41-50) than the younger ones. What makes this group special is that there are more people among these ages mentioning that Facebook is a place for self-affirmation.

The open-ended question where participants was asked what the first word they think about when they hear about Facebook is gave the following results. Most frequently used words in a descending order was; social media, pictures, friends, advertising, communication, affirmation/self-affirmation and attention. These are the most common perceptions of Facebook followed by some sporadic used words.
Analysis

When reading the different answers from the survey made on the subject one first of all sees that people are using Facebook daily or several times a week no matter what age. Even though the people asked has been a lot of students, other age groups answers quite similar to those regarding how often they use Facebook. What one can tell from the answers is that the older you get, the less you seem to use Facebook, even though it is still several times a week.

According to the results from the survey people’s main perception about Facebook is that it is an entertaining page. Along with that people perceive Facebook as an advertising channel. This can be compared to Roberts and her study showing that students don't want Facebook to change they way advertising is used. Roberts also claims that most students don't change their perceptions about companies using Facebook as a platform to advertise. It seems they find Facebook entertaining even if there are a lot of advertising appearing in your feed. The survey find that the overall perceptions are as stated that Facebook is entertaining and an advertising platform but also a place to pass time, find events and some even perceive it as a video platform.

Yang & Brown mainly says that the perception of Facebook among students are that, Facebook is cool, it is a way to raise your popularity, it is seen as a learning tool and an activating site. Deng & Tavares claim that people think of Facebook as informative and a place to exchange experiences. These are somewhat alike and you can see that Facebook is perceived as a place to communicate.

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The usage of Facebook is extremely high (Facebook, 2016). According to both O’Bannon, Beard & Britt and Yang & Brown, students say that they mainly use Facebook to maintain existing relations but O’Bannon, Beard & Britt also say it is used to meet new people and because it is cool. Another way that is shown in both the survey and also according to O’Bannon, Beard & Britt is that it is used to simply pass time. Yang & Brown also mentions that Facebook is used to stay in touch with friends you don’t meet very often, the same or a likely reason is shown in the survey when people mention they use Facebook to contact old classmates they haven’t met for a long time.

The age group 11-20 all say they use Facebook as a way of passing time. While doing that it is mainly used to find and create events as well as look at videos. 21-30 also uses Facebook as a way of passing time. They do as well as the 11-20 years old uses it to find and create events and to look at videos. What stands out from the previous age group is that the ones in the age group 21-30 says they use Facebook to find old classmates and to keep touch with them. They also say they use it to find and share information just like Facebook says their mission is (Facebook, 2016).

31-40 are no exception from the others when it comes to using Facebook as a way of passing time. This group don’t use it to find and create events in the same extent as younger age groups. They are using it more to find old friends and to keep contact with older friends they don’t meet very often. That proves Yang & Brown’s view of Facebook usage. Another way this group is using Facebook is to find groups for their interests and thereby connect with people liking the same things as they do. That could be groups about watches, dancing, training, food or almost anything else.

The group of 41-50-years old people are quite alike the previous group of 31-40 regarding their answers in the survey. They use Facebook as a way of passing time but also to keep contact with friends they don’t meet very often. Apart form that Facebook is used to find old classmates and to a small extent to find groups with the same interests.

When looking at the two oldest age groups, 51-60 and 60-, one can tell that these answers are quite similar. Just like the others they use Facebook as a way of passing time. Something that is increasing with age is the way they use Facebook as a platform to keep contact with old friends and even with old classmates. These age groups are saying that is one of the main reasons why they use...
Facebook. In addition to that Facebook is used, just the way the like, to find and share information with your friends on the network.

The answers spread out on the entire group of respondents are pretty similar to the answers in each age group. When looking at all the age groups together you can see that almost everyone uses Facebook as a way of passing time and moreover to, find events (33%), look at videos (31%), create events (28%), find and share information (23%), find groups for one's interests (18%) and to find old classmates (18%). These activities could therefore be seen as what people find entertaining about Facebook since almost every participant answered that, Facebook is entertaining.

The last question of the survey made room for other comments, when reading these there were five respondents that had really interesting thoughts about Facebook.

“The problem is that the common man takes whatever is written for a truth.” (Anonymous survey, 2016)

“Maintaining private network. Reflects over the often lack of source criticism regarding shared posts, etc. Also embedded algorithms who are likely to strengthen the "worldview" you already have instead of giving more perspectives and knowledge. Therefore I don’t see this as a source of knowledge and information but a way to not lose touch with old friends regardless of the exchange of mobile number or email address.” (Anonymous survey, 2016)

“Facebook is a platform that I use very much, in fact daily but during the last two years I do think the time spent on Facebook has gone down. The reason is because I find Facebook the feed of my Facebook to be quite uninteresting since it contains mainly previously shared posts from random people that my friends like. Along with that advertising is taking over the feed which at sometimes is good because it helps me find something I’ve been looking for but too often it annoys me and makes me log-off earlier.” (Anonymous survey, 2016)

“Facebook has in the recent years become more unattractive because the feed only includes advertising, short clips, and various tag solutions and no longer friends' own posts. I rarely look at
the feed for this reason, but only on what happens in the private/closed groups I participate in.” (Anonymous survey, 2016)

“I basically only cover the groups that I have chosen to be in, that helps me in my work and my interests. Moreover, Facebook becomes increasingly irrelevant with more and more advertising, links to articles that friends have liked. I do not like that.” (Anonymous survey, 2016)

When reading these comments it seems like they agree with the other respondents at some points but maybe not as much with the students that Roberts examined. It does however strengthens the claim that Facebook is mainly used to keep contact with existing friends. These respondents seem to think that Facebook is not as personal as it might have been. Maybe there is a limit to the amount of advertising that can be shown and actually appreciated in some way. There might also be a limit of how many shared videos, likes, comments and posts that originates from someone you have never heard of, that should be shown in your feed. Roberts claim students don’t want Facebook to stop using advertising completely but there might be room for a change when looking at the answers from the survey where almost every respondents perceive Facebook as an advertising channel.

Another interesting comment is the perception saying that people takes whatever is written for a truth. That could be a big problem combined with the mentioned algorithms that apparently are likely to strengthen people's existing worldview. New thoughts and new information is probably a good thing when seeing it with critical eyes instead of having the naive attitude that everything is true.

So there are some differences in the use of Facebook among different age groups. However the main reasons are similar to each other since Facebook is used pass time in a great extent no matter what age group . In addition there are differences between the younger and older age groups since the younger use Facebook to create and find the event and watch videos to a greater extent than the older. The older instead uses Facebook to find and keep in touch with old friends and classmates than the younger ones do.

Overall, the biggest reason to use Facebook whether you are young or old, is to maintain existing relations. Since the feed is full of advertising, shared posts and other things the way of keeping...
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touch with your friends is by groups, private posts and messages because the risk that it disappears among all the other information appears relatively large.

Conclusion

When taking these studies in mind you can draw the conclusion that Facebook is a platform that are used by many. But when looking at the number of respondents in each age group it appears to be more young people that uses it. The older you get the less people seem to use Facebook. However it is still used in a large extent since most people claim they use it several times a week. What differentiates the older age groups from the younger ones is that among the younger respondents almost everyone states that they use Facebook daily.

The overall perception among Facebook users is that Facebook is an entertaining platform even though many thinks there is a lot of advertising appearing on it. Even though there are advertising on the site most people don’t want that to change. Therefore another conclusion would be that most people find the advertising relevant and good. Some might even think it is helpful when scanning the markets for new things to buy. Because of that Facebook can be used as a channel to find things you are interested to buy as well as finding and communicating with friends.

When comparing these answers to the fact that people find Facebook entertaining and as an advertising space, you can actually see what kind of activities they find entertaining and in what segments to use advertising to reach out to as many as possible.

Older people are using Facebook as a tool to connect with friends they don’t meet very often or to find old classmates to keep contact with. That is probably age related since younger people haven’t had the time to create these “old” relationships with their friends and therefore haven’t got the need to get contact with them since they already have it. Therefore one conclusion is that older people are using Facebook as a tool to keep contact with old friends and classmates more than the younger does.
Further studies

When looking at usage there would also be interesting to examine and compare the usage of individuals and companies to see how they are using Facebook differently. Companies are probably using Facebook in a greater extent to advertise and show what they stand for and sell than individuals, or at least in a different way.

Sources


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