

# Facebook as a Tool for Promoting Global Social Relationships

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## **Abstract**

*This study was conducted to explore the importance of facebook as a tool for promoting social relationships and bonding people across the world. The study examines the relationship between use of facebook, a popular online social network site, and the formation and maintenance of social relationships. The population of the study was Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) University and the sample size was 370 students. For data collection quantitative methods were used. The data collected from the study population was statistically analyzed by using SPSS. The findings illustrate that social media (facebook) is emerging as an important tool to promote global social relationships irrespective of geographic, racial, religious and ethnic differences.. By doing this the social media in general and face book in particular makes a significant contribution in overcoming the divisions based on the notion of the “West and North” or the First World and the Third World. The results from the study show that usage of facebook is common among university students and different students use facebook for different purpose. For example, (25.7%) respondents reported that they use facebook for the sake of entertainment. Majority of the respondents (80.3%) considered facebook as an easy way to share their ideas among friends and colleagues across the world. The relationship between the two selected variables (facebook has connected people across the world and it is a useful source for promoting social relationships) showed a strong association.*

**Key words:** Facebook, students, global, social relationship, communication

## **Introduction**

The contemporary societies across the world have witnessed remarkable change in the almost every field of life. Among other factors such changes can be well attributed to the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) (Castells, 2001; Healy, 2001). This has largely been possible to the proliferation of internet (Baym, 1995). Technological advancements have changed the ways by which humans communicate with each other and are connected with rapid and cumulative means (Dawson, 2010). Among the immense variety of online tools for communication, social networking sites have become the most up to date and attractive tools for connecting people across the world (Aghazamani, 2010).

The Social Network Sites are one of the clear examples of socially created media. One of their important functions is to provide appropriate medium to maintain social relations across the World (Quan & Young, 2010). Social networking sites are comparatively new forms of communication in which individuals create virtual profiles and form networks with friends, family, co-workers, and others across the world (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Social media provides a space for individuals, especially the youth, to participate in the act of utilization as well as in the construction and sharing of ideas, knowledge and culture. This act of participation is called

participatory culture and it is manifested in affiliation, expression, collaboration, distribution and circulation (Jenkins et al. 2009).

Facebook was introduced as a social networking site on 24 February 2004 by Harvard students Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. Facebook users can create a personal profile, add other users as friends to send and receive messages that include automatic notification when they update their profile. Users may join common interest groups which are organized by workplace, school, and other characteristics. The name of the facebook emerged from the verbal name for the book that was given to students at the beginning of the academic year by administrations of university in the US with the idea of helping students to know each other in a better way. Facebook has become so popular especially among students (Debatin *et al*, 2009).

Facebook allows its users to keep in touch with old friends and those at other schools, to make new friends, to join different groups according to their interests, promote their parties, check how many personal messages/wall posts they received from their friends, and see other people's pictures and new features that facebook constantly adds. The mission of Face book provides the power of sharing to people and make the world more open and connected (Graves, L. 1992).

Research has found that a large number of students are using facebook as a mean of communication. For example, some universities in the Midwest United States reported that 91% of the students surveyed were using facebook (Khan & Jarvenpaa, 2010). Different users are involved in networking activities deferentially, depending upon their personalities and cultural backgrounds. Research has found that people's attitudes related to internet, their interests and activities vary with their age, gender and personality traits (Johnson, 2009).

There are several benefits related with Internet use, such as access to needed information, global access to news and events, and interpersonal communication through email. On the other hand, along with the extraordinary growth of the Internet and its use, there has been a growing concern universally regarding the risks related with Internet over-use (Bandura, A. 1977). Among the many advantaged related to facebook one that is found be the fact that it has proved to be useful in reinforcing existing ties and communities by keeping users constantly updated about what is going on with their contacts (Hargittai, 2007). Facebook can fulfill the informational needs of users, a key ingredient for strengthening weak ties and promoting collective action (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Shah et al., 2001).

The above discussion illustrates that facebook has emerged as more than a tool for entertainment but is serving communities across the world in many other ways. In the context of Pakistan the use of facebook has increased immensely over the years with the availability of internet. This as a background the purpose of this study was to explore the importance of social media for the youth especially in terms of its contribution in connecting people and facilitating global social relations.

## **Literature Review**

Social Network Sites (SNS) have made life easy in terms of access to information (Lewis, 2008). Facebook as one of the most popular SNS has rapidly connected the world and developed a chain of social relations at global level. Previous research shows that social media in general and facebook in particular has been employed for different purpose by the users across the world. There has been a wide range of research on facebook and its role in maintaining social

relationship across the world. It has been found that facebook is employed mostly to keep connected with people and to know them better (Joinson, 2008; Golder et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2008; Wiese and Farrugia, 2009).

Ellison *et al.*, (2007) conducted research to study the relationship between use of facebook, and the establishment and maintenance of social capital and one's ability to stay linked with members of an earlier settled community. Similarly, in a study involving 364 university students, Golder et al. (2007) found that one of the users, most frequent activities on facebook is writing messages. In order to communicate, facebook users can write to each other through private messages, chat, comments, and wall posts messages that publicly appear on a user's personal page.

It has been commonly observed that popularity of facebook is just not limited in the circle of young generation; people of every age can be found connected at Face book. Lenhart and Madden (2007) have established that youngsters often use social networks for the formation and the protection of friendships. For example a study revealed that 7% of the teen agers were using facebook. A total of 22% reported to be using social network sites a number of times a day, 26% it once a day. As long as the purpose of the facebook was considered, 49% used social network sites to create new friends, 91% using to stay in touch with accessible friends. Youngsters from middle and lower income families were more likely to say that they use the sites to make new friends than higher income youth.

Stern and Taylor (2007) carried out a survey among 364 university students and found that only a small number of users try to meet new people or try to initiate a relationship via facebook and that most of them use it to maintain already existing relationships. Facebook has also been found to be frequently used to maintain distant relationships, as it allows for immediate communication between users who are geographically far (Golder *et al.*, 2007; Sheldon, 2008; Dong, 2008).

Young et al., (2009) examined that students often spend a lot of time on facebook creating profile, updating. Students have also been reported to use the facebook for conversation with friends, sharing pictures of event they attended among others. Donath and Boyd (2004) have argued that online social networking systems can help individuals to maintain a larger number of close ties than people can typically maintain without such technology, as the systems allow people to check one another's sites for updates and reflect new activities.

However, it has also been reported that facebook besides being a medium for enjoyment and entertainment also plays an important role in learning. Mazman and Usluel (2010) developed an educational model explaining how students could use facebook for learning. According to them, facebook can have an educational value because it can be used for communication, cooperation, and as a resource of sharing.

Joinson (2008) presented the phenomenon of relational maintenance under an approach called 'uses and gratifications'. The scoring not only allows the knowledge that people use facebook for specific reasons, but also how each use is likely to be more or less important for each participant and how this is distributed among a group of users. Joinson identifies two main functions associated with 'keeping in touch': building social capital and surveillance. While

building social capital confirms once again the use of facebook to maintain relationships with friends, the concept of ‘surveillance’ refers to the next motivation for facebook use: learning about others. This indicates that facebook is playing a significant role in maintaining social relationships and strengthening close ties in a more meaning full ways.

## Methodology

The potential of facebook to promote global social relations was determined by using quantitative research methods. The locale of the study was university of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Population of the AJK University is large and it was difficult to cover the entire population. By using purposive sampling technique a sample size of 370 was selected. The opinion of respondents was sought through a well structured questionnaire. Data was integrated and analyzed by using quantitative analytical techniques to draw valid conclusions. Tables, frequencies and percentages were used in case of the quantitative techniques. Chi square test was used to check the association between variables.

## Results and Discussion

An equal proportion of the male and female respondents (50% each) were taken from the study population. Table 1 show that the age of the respondents was categorized into three groups. 20% were in the age group of below 20, 72.7 % were in age group of 21-30, 7.3 % were in the age group of 31 and above. The majority of the student’s belonged to the second category of age group i.e. 21-30, since they joined university after Graduation. Table 1 shows that out of 370 respondents 54.9 % were living in urban areas and 45.1 % were living in rural areas.

**Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents according to their demographic variables**

	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	185	50.0
	Female	185	50.0
	Total	370	100.0
Age	< 20	74	20.0
	21-30	269	72.7
	31<	27	7.3
	Total	370	100
Residences	Urban	203	54.9
	Rural	167	45.1
	Total	370	100.0

The findings of the study show that the time spent on face book varied for the respondents and the majority did not spend more than an hour on the social media. Table 2 illustrates that 31.9 % students spend less than 30 minutes on their time on face book, 35.4 % students spend 30 minutes to one hour on face book and 32.7 % spend more than one hour on face book.

**Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents on the account of start using Face book**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
< 30 minutes	118	31.9
30 minutes to 1 hour	131	35.4
more than one hour	121	32.7
Total	370	100.0

Recent discourses on the use of social media have shown great concern about the effect of social media on the ethics and values of individuals. Table 3 indicates that 42.7% respondents agreed that ethics are affected by using face book while 57.3% respondents did not agree to this. They were of the view that using facebook does not mean to violate the normative order of the society. They were very selective about the people they added on facebook and about the use of pages on the site. In addition the majority of the respondents also stated that they gave equal time and importance to religious pages on facebook which kept them connected to their religion and culture.

**Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents on the effect of facebook on ethics**

<b>Effect on ethics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	158	42.7
No	212	57.3
May be	0	0.0
Total	370	100.0

Table 4 highlights the preferences of respondents in terms of their use of different pages on facebook. The data shows that 25.7% respondents liked entertainment pages, 24.6% liked religious pages, 47.3% liked useful information and 2.4% respondents liked pages of games on facebook. The fact that majority i.e. 47.3% used facebook for useful information indicates that face book is not only used for entertainment but it can also be used for academic purpose as well.

**Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents according to the pages they liked on Facebook**

<b>Pages</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Entertainment	95	25.7
Religious	91	24.6
Useful information	175	47.3
Games	9	2.4
Total	370	100.0

The data (Table 5) shows that 37.3 % respondents thought that face book is helpful for students, 17% respondents did not consider facebook helpful for students whereas 45.7% respondents agreed to some extent with the above statement.

**Table 5: Percentage distribution of respondents on facebook as a helpful tool for studies**

<b>Helpful</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	138	37.3
No	63	17.0
To some extent	169	45.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The study has found that facebook can be helpful to students in many ways. Students can get engaged in useful tools related to their subjects which can benefit them in many ways. They can build skills that they may need once they finished their education. This fact is well supported in literature. In Astin's (1984) theory of student engagement the use of facebook is related to engagement in the real-world. Using this one can argue that engagement in certain activities on facebook activities can also be related to engagement in the real social world. This study found both positive and negative predictors, it is possible that faculty and administrators could develop educational practices that include using facebook in ways that maximize both engagement and academic benefits. Indeed, there is already evidence to support this notion that technologies that students are already using can be repurposed in ways that improve engagement and educational outcomes (Junco, Heiberger et al., 2010).

In order to argue that facebook is playing an important role in promoting social relationship it is central to determine its role sharing ideas. The opinion of students regarding the role of facebook in sharing ideas shows a positive response. Table 6 indicates that 80.3% respondents believed that facebook is an easy way to share their ideas across the world. They were of the opinion that facebook is the platform where people share their different ideas with one another by giving comments on mentioned statements on various issues. However, 19.7% respondents disagreed with this statement that facebook promoted global ideas. Similar findings have been reported in the literature. Previous research has shown that facebook is employed mostly to keep in touch with people and to know them better (Joinson, 2008; Golder et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2008; Wiese and Farrugia, 2009). According to Andreassen, as reported in the online news of the University of Bergen, the team found out that People who are anxious and socially insecure use facebook more than those with lower scores on those traits, probably because those who are anxious find it easier to communicate via social media than face-to-face.

**Table 6: Percentage distribution of respondents that they use Face book to share ideas**

<b>Share ideas</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	297	80.3
No	73	19.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

In the light of the responses of the students association was found between variables as presented below.

**Table 7: Results of association between variables.**

H<sub>0</sub>: Face book has not connected the world as a source of social relationships.

H<sub>1</sub>: Face book has connected the world as a source of social relationships.

**Level of significance:** α= 0.05

**Test statistics:** 
$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^c \frac{(O_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}}$$

<b>Facebook is a useful source of social relationships</b>					
<b>Facebook has connected people across the world</b>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>To some extent</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>Yes</b>	53	80	76	209
	<b>No</b>	45	87	29	161
	<b>Total</b>	98	167	105	370

<b>value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>P value</b>
16.027	2	.000

The table 7 shows that the degree of freedom is 2 and its P value is .000 which is less than 0.05, so we reject the null hypothesis and concluded that according to the responses of students facebook has connected the world as well as expanded the social relationships among peoples across the world. People are connected with each other through social media to share their ideas, learn information about the world. Similar findings have been reported in literature. For example, in a study involving 364 university students, Golder et al. (2007) found that one of the users' most frequent activities on Face book is writing messages. In order to communicate, facebook users can write to each other through private messages, chat, comments, and wall posts.

**Conclusion**

This study was conducted with the premise that facebook has created a space where people get to know about each other, about their lives and their contexts beyond the geographic boundaries. It has been found in this study that facebook offers a fast and rapid access to information to people across the world irrespective of their localities, caste, culture etc. By doing this facebook is playing a role in creating a shared system of ideology where people are grouped on the basis of their ideas interests and common philosophy about life. This also implies, social media is creating new identities in the modern world. The study concludes that facebook can prove to be a useful site, if used positively. The findings show that there seemed to be no negative effect of facebook on the ethics of students. It is clear that students use facebook as a source of entertainment and have a strong point of view that it is a very important tool for maintaining social relationships across the world.

## **About the Authors**

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