Examining Factors Influencing the Use of Social Networking by College Students

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Abstract: The proliferation of social networking use such as Facebook and Linkedin has created a phenomenon that engages millions of Internet users around the world. The purpose of this research is to develop and test a research model that investigates factors influencing college students’ decision to use social networking. The research model investigates the impact of personality traits, perceived usefulness, and perceived social presence on the decision to use social media. The results will allow us to develop a better understanding of predictors of social media use among college students.

Introduction

In an effort to meet the increasing technological expectations of undergraduate students, in recent years, there has been an increasingly growing trend in higher education of incorporate emerging technological applications in the classroom environment. Having grown up with technologies, such as computers, smartphones, and the Internet being more ubiquitous than in the past, today’s students use Web 2.0 tools and social networking applications on a regular basis. Additionally, a number of research studies have emerged illustrating the potential of these emerging technological applications to improve teaching and learning (Ferdig, 2007; Maloney, 2007; Pence, 2007). However, empirical research exploring factors influencing the use of social networking tools, as well as student perceptions of the benefits of using social networks to support educational endeavors.

The Project

The purpose of this project is to assess undergraduate students’ use and perceptions of the potential of the pedagogical benefits of social networking applications. An additional focus of this project is to explore factors that influenced the adoption or non-use of social networking applications. The research questions to be explored in this study are: 1. To what extent are college students aware of the pedagogical benefits of using social networking tools in instructional settings? 2. To what extent do college students use social networking applications to support academic endeavors? 3. To what extent do college students use social networking applications to support “real-world” socialization endeavors? 4. To what extent to personality traits influence the perception of the instructional and socialization benefits and drawbacks of social networks?, and 5. To what extent do personality traits influence the use of social netowking applications in academic and “real-world” socialization endeavors?

To address these questions, participants will be given a web based survey that asks them to rate different items on a Likert-type scale, with a few items that provide opportunities for elaboration.

Conclusion

The focus of this presentation is to illustrate the resulting patterns of both academic and social applications of social networking tools. Additionally, the presentation will discuss results related to: 1. Undergraduate student perceptions of the use of social networking tools in instructional settings, and 2. An analysis of factors important to undergraduate students when deciding whether or not to use social media tools. Lastly, it is the hope of the researchers that exploring these findings will provide support for appropriate and effective opportunities and support services for instructors, ultimately leading to “best practices” models to facilitate the adoption and use of social networking technologies as tools for improving teaching and learning in higher education.