

Attitudes, use, and gratification of Thai university students in Bangkok towards online social networks

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Submitted 15 March 2012; accepted in final form 14 October 2012

Abstract

The objectives of this research were to study the attitudes of Thai university students living in Bangkok towards online social networking, and to study the user behavior and the gratification derived from social networking websites. The researcher collected data using both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative approaches (in-depth interviews with informal interview questions). The results of this study indicated that the attitudes of all university students toward online social networking websites such as Facebook were positive and that they received a high level of gratification. The results also acknowledged and confirmed that differences in the demographic profiles of the students were the major causes of differences in attitude, usage behavior, and in gratification levels. Additionally, the results also acknowledged and confirmed that attitudes and usage behaviors was related to gratification levels.

Keywords: attitudes, uses, gratification, online social network, facebook, mass communication

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาทัศนคติของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครที่มีต่อเครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ (Online Social Network) และศึกษาพฤติกรรมการใช้ประโยชน์จากเครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ ของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครและเพื่อศึกษาความพึงพอใจของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครที่มีต่อเครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ โดยใช้วิธีการศึกษาแบบผสมผสานวิธี คือ วิธีการวิจัยเชิงปริมาณด้วยการใช้แบบสอบถามในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยประกอบด้วยการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพด้วยวิธีการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึก (In-depth Interview) โดยใช้แนวคำถาม ประกอบกับการสัมภาษณ์บุคคลแบบไม่เป็นทางการ/ผลการวิจัยพบว่าทัศนคติของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร ที่มีต่อเครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ ประเภท Facebook โดยรวมมีทัศนคติเชิงบวก และมีระดับความพึงพอใจในระดับมาก ผลการวิจัยยังยืนยันว่านักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครที่มีลักษณะทางประชากรศาสตร์ที่แตกต่างกันมีทัศนคติ มีพฤติกรรมการใช้ประโยชน์ และมีความพึงพอใจเกี่ยวกับเครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ ที่แตกต่างกันจริง นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยพบว่าทัศนคติและพฤติกรรมการใช้ประโยชน์ของนักศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษาในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครมีความสัมพันธ์กันกับความพึงพอใจเกี่ยวกับเครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์จริง

คำสำคัญ: ทัศนคติ, การใช้ประโยชน์, ความพึงพอใจ, เครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์, Facebook, การสื่อสารมวลชน

1. Introduction

Globalization has resulted in the rapid development of communication technology among which online communication can be most conveniently and easily used to reach target audiences while saving on expenses (ComScore, 2011). People worldwide understand and recognize that 'the Internet' is the most popular kind of 'new media', which is extensive and widespread. That means it assist people to reach to the success of communication.

The main reason for this phenomenon is due to the characteristics of the Internet and its functions. It can be used to reach large numbers of people with minimal capital investment. As a result,

many organizations have become dependent on the Internet in order to be a part of organized communication networks, such as public relations, product advertising, commercial communication, and so on. The Internet has also become an entertainment medium within the family structure, and exists side by side with such activities as listening to the radio, watching television, and reading the newspaper. All of these activities can be accessed through the Internet. Therefore, the Internet can support and respond to human needs in daily life.

In the present era, the technological world appears in the form of various social networking websites such as WhatsApp, Line, Instagram,

Twitter, and Linked, including Facebook. One might say that its reputation of network characteristic views -- characteristics at least in a cyber perspective -- are the majority of users. In the same way, the latest ratio in ComScore (2011), reported in July 2011, indicated that the majority of Americans are aware of social networking websites, although Facebook is still the most popular, which is not in accordance with the updated trend. This phenomenon can be linked to the amount of accessibility statistics for July, 2011, when Facebook access was reported to have been higher than before with approximately 162 million log-ins occurring in June, 2011. Meanwhile, Twitter has been growing in a similar direction. Although Twitter has a smaller number of users, it is seen as 'the most beloved' among teenage users. There were 32.8 million Twitter logins in July 2011, compared to 5 million log-ins in May and June of the same year (<http://thumbsup.in.th>, 22 August, 2011).

According to Facebook user's ratio records, Thailand ranks 21st in the world for the number of users. With regard to the nature of Thai users on Facebook, there were 168,720 users in 2009, 1,963,560 users in 2010, and 6,732,780 users in 2011 (<http://thumbsup.in.th>, 24 February, 2011). Probably the most important aspect of Facebook is its appropriateness for Thailand's modern lifestyle. This can portray the picture of Facebook power affecting to the levels of attitudes, use, and gratification of people in Bangkok towards this kind of online social networks.

As people in Thai society and organizations seem to be so accepting of social networking platforms, in their daily lives it is necessary for us to try to understand the human behavioral phenomena as they relate to content, how relationships develop, how content is shared, how chats relating to content are constructed, and how content is commented upon (www.thaihealth.or.th, 24 February, 2011).

With the recognition of Thai teenagers' behavior, it is not difficult to understand the role of Facebook in their daily lives. The significance of Facebook among Thai teenagers' can also be seen in the report from 'CheckFacebook'. In this report it was revealed that almost all Thai teenagers are Facebook members, with over a total of 5,300,000 users, of which, 2 million are between the ages of 18-24 years old. This means that they are likely to be university students- the largest demographic of Facebook users in Thailand (<http://www.thaidigitalmarketing.com>, 28 August, 2011).

Regarding to technological communication within the society and communication discipline, "demographic concept, attitude concept, computer-mediated computer, and use and gratification theory" has been mainly explained and described subject matter by scholars and researchers in a variety of communication field. This research of attitudes, use, and gratification of Thai university students in Bangkok towards online social networks studied and built upon several key of communication assumptions in order to understand the behavior process from a perspective that emphasize mediated communication, and it can eventually be developed.

Thus, this study directly addresses the levels of attitudes, uses, and gratification of Thai university students in Bangkok towards "online social networks". This target demographic is the largest group of Facebook members in Thailand. Additionally in order to develop the business world's communication networks, it is necessary to analyze phenomena in terms of psychology, demographics, and behaviors to collect reference points through which changes of communication patterns can be perceived.

2. Objectives

1. To study the attitudes of Thai university students in Bangkok toward Facebook.
2. To study the behavior of Thai university students in Bangkok toward Facebook.
3. To study the gratification of Thai university students in Bangkok toward Facebook.

Research Hypotheses

H₁: The demographic differences (sex, age range, undergrads and salary) of Thai university students in Bangkok and how these characteristics contribute to different attitudes towards online social networks.

H₂: The demographic differences (sex, age range, undergrads and salary) of Thai university students in Bangkok and how these characteristics contribute to their different behavior use towards online social networks.

H₃: The demographic differences (sex, age range, undergrads and salary) of Thai university students in Bangkok and how these characteristics determine different gratification responses towards online social networks.

H₄: How the personal attitudes of Thai university students in Bangkok are related to the

gratification response towards online social networks.

H₅: How is the behavior of Thai university students in Bangkok and their use of online social networks related to their level of gratification towards online social networks.

3. Materials and Methods

The researcher collected the data through a combination of two main research methods; a research survey with construct-questionnaires and qualitative research through an informal semi-interview. The number of students involved with this study was 288,415 students who were enrolled in both government and private universities in Bangkok. The participants were 400 students corresponding to Yamane (1970). Participants were sampled with multi-stage sampling methods. Firstly, they were sampled with cluster sampling from 18 Universities in Bangkok, which can be divided to 7 government universities (Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Thammasat University, Mahidol, Silpakorn University, Srinakharinwirot University, and King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok) and 11 private universities (Bangkok University, Krirk University, Kasem Bundit University, St. John University, Mahanakorn University of Technology, Dhurakij Pundit University, Sripatum University, Siam University, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Assumption University, and South-East Asia University). Secondly, the universities were sampled with quota sampling. This means 5 government universities and 5 private universities. Thirdly, the universities were sampled with simple random sampling. The sampling results are divided as groups. Group 'One' universities were representatives from government universities – 1) Chulalongkorn University, 2) Kasetsart University, 3) Thammasat University, 4) Srinakharinwirot University, and 5) King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok, and Group 'Two' universities were representatives from private universities –1) Bangkok University, 2) Dhurakij Pundit University, 3) University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, 4) Sripatum University, and 5) Siam University. Finally, 400 participants were sampled with proportion to size sampling. This means 41 Chulalongkorn University students, 48 Kasetsart University students, 43 Thammasat University students, 57 Srinakharinwirot University students, 30 King Mongkut's University of

Technology North Bangkok students, 50 Bangkok University students, 30 Dhurakij Pundit University students, 33 University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce students, 42 Sripatum University, and 26 Siam University students.

Each participant received a cover letter describing the purpose of the research. The letter also provided a detailed questionnaire, which participants completed personally. The questionnaire measured a broad range of cognitive and behavioral points that individuals typically experience with Facebook. The measure contained three subscales, each of which measured a different point using a 5 point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The subscale assessed the degree to which the person felt and behaved as a result of using Facebook. The participants were asked to report on their current attitude, behavior, and gratification, defined as a stronger response than typically experienced while using other websites. Conversations with participants were recorded to enable future cross-reference with the follow-up survey.

4. Measurement and data analysis

The results of the survey were presented through the use of several methods and scales. These were mean results, standard deviations, reliability coefficients, and correlations for those measures. Regression analyses was also utilized to examine the hypotheses. They contained the three main variables (demographics, attitude and use) which were positioned as independent variables, with one variable (gratification) as the dependent variable.

5. Results and findings

The details and information gained from the quantitative research results were presented, and qualitative research findings were supported the results. The details and informations are as follow.

5.1 Participants' demographics

The total number of participants consisted of a total of four hundred university students, consisting of 61% women and 39% men, who were aged from 18-26 years ($M = 1.34$ is this the mean of students' age, $SD = 0.621$). Approximately 46.3% of the respondents reported being freshmen, 27.3% sophomores, 16% juniors, and 10.5% seniors. Participants had an income ranging from 2,000 – over 5,000 Baht ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.648$).

Participants also were asked by what means they gained access to their Facebook account. The most prevalent means of connection was computer (42%), followed by both computer and mobile phone (30%), and finally mobile phone (28%).

5.2 Attitudes toward Facebook

With regard to participants' attitudes toward Facebook, a descriptive analysis was used to measure their attitude response. It measured various items, including freedom of interactive communication ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.78$), avenue to express personal opinion ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.76$), the advantage of social networking ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.77$), the exchange of ideas and opinions ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.83$), the characteristics of modern behavior ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.95$), activity participation ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 0.94$), daily activity ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.88$), the use of the 'Like' function ($M = 3.30$), thoughts and response to an unsecured network ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.99$), thoughts and response to the use of this medium as an avenue to threaten another ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.05$), the open-system network ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.02$), thoughts and response to this being a complicated network ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.94$) and faked behavior and expression ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 0.97$). These thirteen items were combined to create an overall score of the participants' attitudes ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.93$) toward Facebook.

Additionally, the students were aware of the importance of Facebook's advantages in the ways of successful communication process and sought out positive opportunities for communication network (e.g., Facebook functions) so that they could assist their friends and colleagues by sharing their experiences, and they were able to build strong relational connections with friends. The students also revealed the positive attitudes to Facebook, and agreed to spend time with this social network. Therefore, the research results and findings demonstrated the students' positive attitudes toward Facebook and the importance of technological interaction among their groups.

5.3 Behaviors of use toward Facebook

The use behavior of participants' of Facebook were measured using a frequency of use scale. The ten-item measure assessed behavior of use with issues such as chatting with friends and searching for old friends ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.95$), updating current news and situations ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.95$), searching daily activities ($M = 3.88$, $SD =$

0.92), sharing photos/clips/personal status ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.08$), expressing and commenting on opinions ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.02$), following the public relations news of organizations and universities ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.99$), following celebrity news ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.18$), games and quizzes ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.19$), personal diaries ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.16$), and searching for information about products and services ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.26$). These ten items were then combined to create an overall score of the participants' behaviors of use ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.07$) towards Facebook.

Additionally, the students indicated the importance of Facebook as central systematic network for behaviors of use the communication methods and membership boundaries. It assists the students led to relationship development and brotherhood among members, which also distanced them from outsiders without. The students also emphasized that Facebook functions served a variety of their characteristics of group communication with this kind of new media, and they did not hesitate to daily get online with Facebook.

5.4 Gratification towards Facebook

A descriptive analysis was used to measure the gratification level of participants towards Facebook. The nine-item measure assessed the gratification level with issues such as Facebook functions and characteristics ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.91$), rapid transaction ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.88$), interactive communication ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.90$), variety of groups or fanpage ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.88$), operation menus ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.88$), variety of applications ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.95$), individual comments ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.92$), enjoyment of games ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.05$), and Facebook reliability ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.90$). These nine items were then combined to create an overall score for the participants' level of gratification ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.91$) towards Facebook.

Additionally, the students satisfied and expressed the positive responses to Facebook, especially in terms of its functions and styles. They learnt about the values of friend membership, society, and relationship to others, which identified the impact of societal life and members in the formative of society. Although it was difficult to manage Facebook feedback as it often resulted to personal and group conflict, almost students still gratified the importance of Facebook's informal interaction to their social discourse, successful

communication and acceptance, and transition into group memberships.

5.5 Results of hypotheses test

The results of hypotheses test of this study are presented as follows:

Regarding to hypothesis 1, it was found that the demographic differences (sex, age range, undergrads and salary) of Thai university students in Bangkok caused attitude differences toward online social networks.

Regarding to hypothesis 2, it was found that the demographic differences (sex, age range, undergrads and salary) of Thai university students in Bangkok caused usage behavior differences toward online social networks.

Regarding to hypothesis 3, it was found that the demographic differences (sex, age range, undergrads and salary) of Thai university students in Bangkok caused differences in levels of gratification received from online social networks.

Regarding to hypothesis 4, it was found that the attitudes of Thai university students in Bangkok was related to gratification received from online social networks.

Regarding to hypothesis 5, it was found that the behavior of Thai university students in Bangkok was related to gratification received from online social networks.

Additionally, Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) strategy for exploring mediation, for example; Tables 1 - 5 presented the results of the regression analysis testing, and the hypothesized links among the variables.

Table 1 One-Way ANOVA Analysis of Hypothesis 1

	N	Mean	S.D.	F	Sig.
<i>H₁</i>	400	3.35	0.857	335.340	0.000(*)

* *p* < .05

The first results showed that the demographic differences of university students were significantly associated with attitude differences (: *f* = 305.368, *p* < .05). Therefore, the hypothesis 1 was accepted.

Table 2 One-Way ANOVA Analysis of Hypothesis 2

	N	Mean	S.D.	F	Sig.
<i>H₂</i>	400	3.42	1.006	547.445	0.000(*)

* *p* < .05

The second results showed that the demographic differences of university students were significantly associated with behaviors of use differences (: *f* = 547.445, *p* < 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Table 3 One-Way ANOVA Analysis of Hypothesis 3

	N	Mean	S.D.	F	Sig.
<i>H₃</i>	400	3.72	0.870	265.614	0.000(*)

* *p* < .05

The third results showed that the demographic differences of university students were significantly associated with gratification differences (: *f* = 265.614, *p* < 0.05). Therefore, the hypothesis 3 was accepted.

Table 4 Correlations Analysis of Hypotheses 4

<i>H₄</i>		attitudes	Gratification
attitudes	Pearson Correlation	1	.978(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	400	400
gratification	Pearson Correlation	.978(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	400	400

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The fourth results showed that the attitudes of university students were significantly related to their level of gratification towards Facebook (: *r* = 0.978, *p* < .01). Therefore, the hypothesis 4 was accepted.

Table 5 Correlations Analysis of Hypothesis 5

<i>H₅</i>		behavior of use	Gratification
behavior of use	Pearson Correlation	1	.976(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	400	400
gratification	Pearson Correlation	.976(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	400	400

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The fifth results showed that the behavior of use by university students was associated with the level of gratification towards Facebook (: $r = 0.976$, $p < .01$). Therefore, the hypothesis 5 was accepted.

To conclude, overall, the results of this study indicated that there were two statistically significant correlations between the independent variables ($r = 0.978$, $p < .01$). The attitudes of university students toward online social networking websites such as Facebook were positive and that they received a high level of gratification. The results also acknowledged and confirmed that differences in the demographic profiles of the students were responsible for differences in attitude, usage behavior, and in gratification levels. The results also acknowledged and confirmed that attitudes and usage behaviors was related to gratification levels.

6. Discussion

The findings of this present study provides support for several of the proposed hypotheses linking attitudes, usage behavior, and gratification towards online social networks. The results indicated that those students who reported having a greater variety of demographic characteristics had stronger differences regarding their attitudes, usage behavior, and gratification of mass media. Regarding the demographic, of respondents, those with major demographic differences sustained their attitudes, although the behaviors of use was not predictive of the stability of their future gratification (Worrakitphokathorn, 1988). This research revealed that an individual's behavior are affected from 'exogenous factors'. This fundamental concept is based on social norms. For example, a certain age group within a particular generation would be expected to behave a certain way. Personal habits differ with gender and level of education for example, and these in-depth details lead to different patterns of behaviors. It means that these findings supported the concept of demographic (Suwan, 1977). Therefore, the demographic differences caused differences of attitudes, uses, and gratification.

The findings are consistent with prior research showing that higher levels of attitude are associated with more frequent expressions of acceptance toward Facebook. The results also identified a link between people's degree of attitude and their use of media. Previous literature has

shown that people with a high positive attitude are more likely to form friendships and to perceive more intimacy in their partner's activities (e.g. Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Mannone, 2007, Chan-Ame, 1981). Furthermore, if students agreed to participate in and like activities on Facebook, they would present a positive attitude to all Facebook functions and characteristics. Moreover, some students remained hesitate in terms of Facebook's security, information reliability, and personal interruption. These results corresponded to the attitude concept (Baron & Kenny, 1986) as multiplex relationships, and the results in Kowint's (2010) research. This paper revealed that participants, who used social networking site Hi5, needed a more effective and reliable security system to protect them from chatting with strangers. Participants shared their negative attitudes towards this weakness in Hi5's design.

Apart from that, this study supported a concept of research by Suwan (1977). It emphasized that participants had negative attitudes towards false and misleading data and complicated functions of websites. The changes in attitudes depended on stimulus, and lead to uninformed decision making. In the same way, Wenner (1985) indentified the types of gratification ratification into four groups; 1) Orientation gratification, 2) Social gratification, 3) Para-social, and 4) Para-orientation gratification. He critiqued the type in which concept of attitude literature has portrayed the liking and attitude level. Indeed, he argued that people who express positive attitudes and frequently use media experience increased levels of satisfaction. Therefore, it is not surprising that the use of Facebook would associate positively with levels of gratification toward Facebook. Additionally, this study's results also relate to the work of Kasemchaiyanon (2001), in which it was revealed that participants usage and level of gratification from the websites in terms of gathering information, transferring information, sending electronic mail, and entertainment was high.

Regarding the issue of behaviors of use and gratification towards Facebook, the participants involved with this study were extremely satisfied. The main reason was because of its functions responding to participants' characteristics, a result that associates to the theory of gratification (Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984). It revealed that each kind of mass media had its own particular characteristic, which integrated with emotional evaluation. It came to be an important variable for establishing the

motivation for an individual's degree of gratification and usage of an avenue of mass media. If an individual experienced a high level of gratification, the effect would influence their attitude and expectations towards the media. Moreover, to gain an understanding of the social network society, research needs to continue to tie computer-mediated communication process to the particular contexts in which they occurs. Additionally, although this research results and findings has demonstrated the importance of social network in the communication process, it is better for the researchers to engage in and observe everyday student life in order to closely detail the content and form of new media discourse, including the resultant meanings by particular interactants.

7. Acknowledgements

I would like to express profound gratitude to my advisors, Associate Professor Dr. Wanlop Lumpai and Assistant Processor Somkiet Rungruengviriya, for their invaluable support, encouragement, supervision and useful suggestions throughout this research work. The moral support and continuous guidance enabled me to complete my work successfully.

I am also grateful to my research assistant, Parichart Chay-in, for assisting me in the collection of data and information through various research methodologies, including arranging the research process. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge all of my respondents.

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