A gender lens perspective of the use of social network in higher education in Malaysia and Australia

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ABSTRACT
The use of social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google Plus, Tumblr, and Instagram, among others, has increased at a very fast pace in the last few years. In tandem with its rising popularity, especially among teenagers, many academics in higher education have been experimenting with its use in formal and less formal ways, in classroom teaching. Studies on the use of SNS in higher education indicate varied results. While some academics found that SNS only divert students from actual study and do not improve academic performance, others discovered that it improves communication and teacher-student relationships. Most however, agree that SNS's popularity with students makes it a very useful tool to exploit for classroom teaching and management. There are very few studies which look into the effect of gender on the use of SNS in education. While studies have concluded that men and women approach and use SNS in slightly different ways, there is little in existing literature which tells us about how the use of SNS in higher education differs between men and women. This paper discusses research on the use of SNS in higher education by both genders. It details the results of a survey conducted in Malaysia and Australia and highlights how men and women perceive SNS use in higher education based on a framework built on Push Pull and Mouving theory.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

General Terms
Human Factors

Keywords
gender, social network sites, higher education, Facebook, SNS literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Murray and Walker [2007 as cited in 15] describe social networking websites as online spaces where users are able to gather and socialize. The introduction of online social network sites (SNS) has allowed sociologists to examine how social network theories can be extended to online environments. In addition, SNS has provided developers and entrepreneurs a tool for various purposes including commercial, political, and educational activities.

As of today, many SNS have been created; each with its own uses base and focus. Currently an entry on [50] lists as many as 198 SNS sites. While the number of SNS continues to grow, some of these are arguably more successful and popular than others. According to [11], the top 10 SNS are Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, LinkedIn, Bebo, Tagged, Instagram, deviantART, Twitter, and FourSquare. According to [30], the top 10 Australian SNS in 2013 are Facebook, YouTube, WordPress.com, Blogspot, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, and Tripehavior. [49] who based her report on Alexa.com reported that the most popular SNS in Malaysia are quite similar to those in Australia: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Tagged, Pinterest, Weibo, Sns2 and Careemove. In short, Malysian and Australians share the same preferences for Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tumblr and Pinterest. The similarity of the use of popular SNS in Malaysia and Australia effectively eliminates the SNS choice as a marketing factor to consider in this study.

The increase of SNS is related directly to the growth of SNS users. Statistics show that Facebook is the most popular SNS with 1.15 billion users in 2013 [15]. Considering that it only had approximately 1 million users by the end of 2011, one can argue that the growth of Facebook has been nothing short of exponential [4]. A project by [19] shows that not only is Facebook the most popular SNS at the time of writing, but also the most accepted, with 63% of its users logging in daily, 22% weekly and 14% less often. In addition, research also shows that Facebook users in