

USING FACEBOOK AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOL FOR CLASS PROJECT

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Abstract

The idea of using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and other social networking sites for teaching and learning might not be appealing to many educators. The detrimental effects that social networking sites might have on the students are some of the concerns raised by these educators, involving the invasion and exploitation of privacy, inappropriate media communication or content, distraction from the traditional way of learning, and many more. However, if the proper structure is put in place and the content is monitored, such social media can become a valuable and interactive teaching and learning tool.

In this paper, the author will share some strategies used on Facebook specifically for class projects, due to its use as a communication platform for online discussions and a way for educators to connect with the students.

Keywords: Social media, Facebook, teaching and learning

1 INTRODUCTION

As of January 2014, according to the Facebook Statistics website, there are more than 500 million users of Facebook and 250 million log in each day. Additionally, Facebook is now used by 1 in every 13 people on earth, with the average user having about 130 friends. 48% of 18-34 year olds check Facebook when they wake up, with 28% doing so before even getting out of bed. The fundamental segment involving 18-24 year old is now growing the fastest, at 74% each year.

Furthermore, over 700 billion minutes a month are spent on Facebook, 20 million applications are installed per day and over 200 million people access Facebook via their mobile phone. 48% of young people said they now get their news through Facebook. Meanwhile, in just 20 minutes on Facebook over 1 million links are shared, 2 million friend requests are accepted and almost 3 million messages are sent.

Undeniably, Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites among the online users. To take advantage of the wide usage of Facebook, this paper will highlight some strategies on using it as a teaching and learning tool in classrooms, specifically for class projects and online discussions among the students.

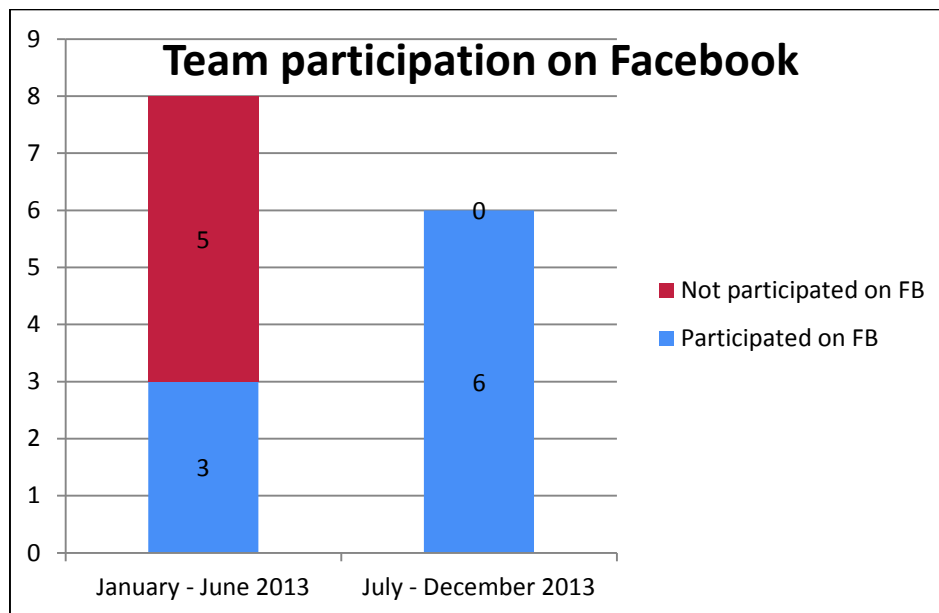
2 i) METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach is employed via conducting surveys and interviews among the students in the Advanced Functions course in CIMP, in the last two semesters, i.e. January – June and June – December 2013. From a total of 104 students, 90 students took part in the surveys. From the 90 respondents, 5 volunteered to be interviewed further on their experiences using the Facebook group features as a communication platform among the team members and a convenient way to stay in touch, and even plan for meet-ups to finish the assigned tasks.

ii) RESULTS

The number of groups of students participating on Facebook has increased in the second semester, July- December 2013 when compared with the first semester. It is observed that for the January-June 2013 semester, only 3 teams created their Facebook groups as requested, out of 8 teams. However, in the second semester, all 6 teams created their closed or secret groups on Facebook.

Graph 1:



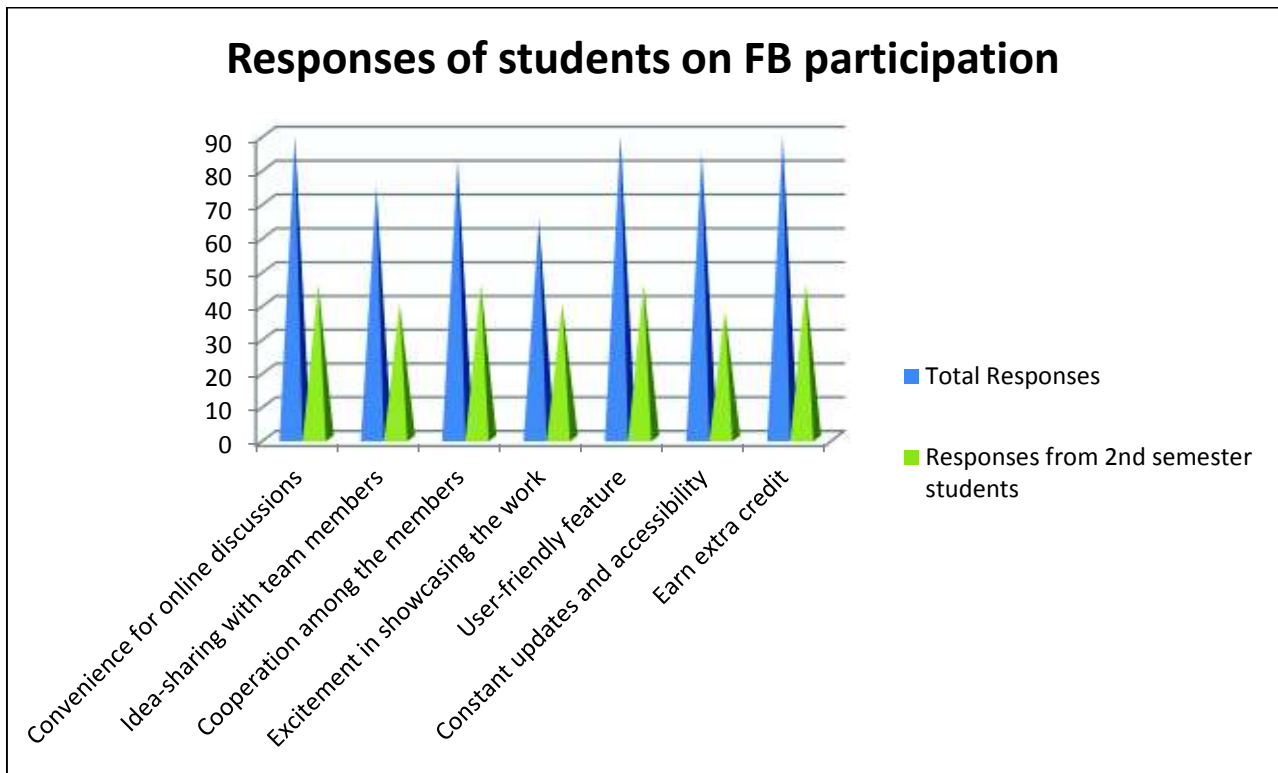
The majority of the respondents of the surveys claimed that they used their smartphones or smart/mobile devices to access the Facebook.

The reasons for full participation on Facebook from the students in the second semester, July – December, 2013 include the following:

- i) Convenience of Facebook for online discussions
- ii) Facebook becomes a platform for sharing ideas with the team members
- iii) Facebook provides a way to collaborate and foster teamwork among the members,
- iv) It is a tool to showcase the students' work-in-progress and final product,
- v) Facebook features are user-friendly especially on uploading images or videos,
- vi) Group members can update their status anytime, 24/7 as long as they are connected to Facebook
- vii) Finally, usage of Facebook as part of the requirements of the project will earn the students some extra marks.

The graphical presentation of the above information is represented in a cone chart below.

Cone Chart 1:



iii) DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Most of the students claimed that using Facebook as part of the online discussions for the class project is a good idea as it assists the members in terms of communication methods and implementation of scheduled tasks for the project. The students could call for a meet-up or chat with each other while doing their tasks. It is very cost-effective, and students, whom the majority are native users of Facebook, agreed that as long as the Internet connections exist with the smartphones and mobile devices, this user-friendly application would help them to contact each other on a 24/7 mode, to update progress and even, share the difficulties encountered. Additionally, the Group feature on Facebook would enable the team members to share ideas and creativity in producing the end-product for the class project.

Most students did not feel threatened when their progress is monitored by the instructor and on becoming the instructor's friend on Facebook. The informal learning environment that was planned contributed to the willingness of the students to participate on Facebook. The students were free to post their statuses and update on their progress from time to time. The more work done, the more frequent the students would share and report the completed work, along with the images and pictures.

To ensure that the privacy of each student and the instructor is maintained, it is advisable for each participant to create a separate Facebook account for this purpose. Such a strategy would allow the postings and relevant status updates to be viewed only by the team members and the instructor who were added to the closed or secret Group. In addition, it is very unlikely that any of the members would post irrelevant materials and items that incriminated the other team members as their Facebook participation should be emphasizing on the ideas and issues related to the assigned project. The instructor's presence in the group would eliminate the possibilities of breaching the privacy and incriminating the other team

members. At the same time, the rules for the group settings have already been discussed beforehand in class. All team members are required to work harmoniously and some marks are allocated for this aspect.

iv) CONCLUSION

With the creative use of Facebook in the classrooms, the communications among the team members can be hassle-free and cost-effective. Students can share their ideas and creativity as well as contribute to the project completion via online discussions, including the uploading of images, videos, relevant resource materials and content search on other websites.

The learning experience of the students can be enhanced as they are able to share their knowledge and ideas with each other in applying the mathematical concepts related to the assigned tasks. The sharing session can be done conveniently once they are connected to Facebook. Any improvements or issues that need to be addressed can also be covered instantly, as the members can chat with each other and post the comments or provide feedback whenever necessary. Such features form an interactive communication platform among the team members.

The informal set-up of the Group allows students to not only learn from each other, but at the same time, contribute ideas and creativity that will help the team completing the tasks and fulfilling the requirements of the project. Gathering relevant information online and sharing with the others instantly will save time and help to address the constraints of face-to-face meetings. With the access to the Internet, an abundance of resource materials can be found and used as references for the project.

Ultimately, the Facebook Group feature is used to monitor the progress of each team on the class project, as a means of communication among the team members, as well as between the team and the instructor. In turn, this promotes an enriched learning experience, provides opportunities for diverse ways of learning and develops cooperation among students.

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