

Access to information of college students via social networking service

Pham Vo Quynh Hanh

MA., Academy of Journalism and Communication

Email: hanhhvbc@gmail.com

Pho Thanh Huong

MA., Academy of Journalism and Communication

Email: pho.thanh.huong@gmail.com

Luu Hong Minh

PhD., Academy of Journalism and Communication

Email: minhpbctt@yahoo.com

Received 8 January 2018; published 5 June 2018

Abstract: *As an internet-based media, social networking service functions as a virtual community that is made up of two main components: a set of social actors and sets of dyadic ties among them. It allows users to communicate with each other through various services such as friend adding, chatting, emailing, picture and movie sharing on demand regardless of space and time. Despite its recent emergence, this service has produced great influences on the communication in a wide range of fields among users, particularly the college students whose engagement has proved more crucial than any others. Based on our survey results, this paper provides a brief description of the situation of college students' information access via social networking sites^(*).*

Keywords: Information access, Social networking service, Social networking site, The college student

^(*) Our survey of college students' information access via social networking sites was carried out in September 2017 for five universities in Hanoi (i.e., National Economics University, Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Academy of Journalism and Communication, Hanoi University of Culture, and Hanoi National University of Education). 499 out of 500 students participated in the survey answered the questionnaires, among those there were 181 males, 317 females, and 1 of other gender.

I. Situation of students' information access via social networking sites

1. Students' participation in social networking sites

Social networking has become increasingly irreplaceable in students' daily life. Research shows that more than 97% of American students have profile on a social networking site. Spending time on these sites seems to be an important daily activity of the young people. (D. Boyd, 2007)

Our survey also reveals all participating students are currently using social networking service.

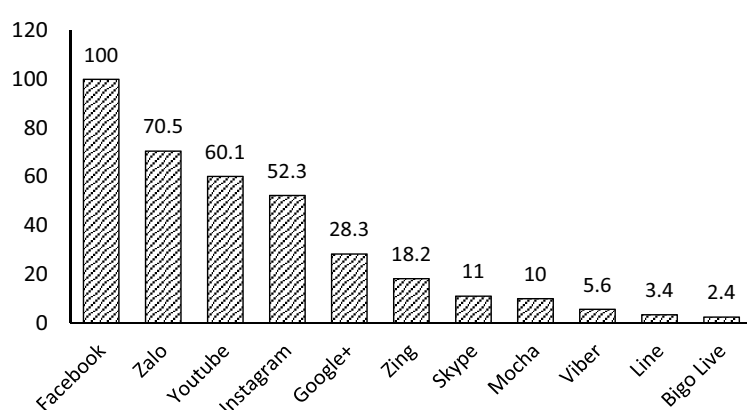
There are many students joining more than just one social networking site. Specifically, only 9.2% of the survey respondents use a single one site for networking while 90% of them reported to have profile on at least two. In particular, students participating in two to five networking sites make up a large share of 78.4%. Some even use more than six sites but they are just a minority (12.4%).

Compared to other types of online services, social networking service is quite new. Nevertheless, the appeal of social networking sites to the majority of users, particularly students, lies in its service novelty. It is the Internet users' tendency of exploring new things that drives them to greatly welcome social networking service. Besides, the advantages of this service over traditional social media are the direct interaction, communication,

and stronger connections. It also meets the diverse needs of users very quickly and easily.

Regarding popular social networking sites to students, our study finds that there are 11 sites currently used, including eight foreign sites (Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Google+, Skype, Viber, Line, and Bigo Live) and three Vietnamese sites (Zalo, Zing, and Mocha) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of survey respondents joining popular social networking sites (%)



Facebook is the most popular social network with 100% of the survey respondents who are its members. It first joined the cyber community 14 years ago (in 2004) and has grown rapidly to be the most widely used network service in the world. Facebook is highly interactive with massive application store, different language settings, and has been early developed on mobile platform. With 64 million Facebook users, Vietnam ranks 7th in the world and represents 3% of the Facebook accounts globally (Kim Thoa, 2017). Therefore, 100% of the students in the survey using Facebook is a comprehensible fact.

Zalo came second with 70.5% of the survey participants as users. This is a Vietnamese application developed by the VNG Corporation and was introduced in 2012.

The third most popular site is Youtube, which was born in 2005 and purchased by Google in 2006. This website allows video sharing and live streaming. Among the world's 15 most popular networking sites (in 2017), Youtube ranked second with 1.5 billion users (Priit Kalas, 2018). Our survey recorded 60.1% of students were using this site.

Instagram follows at the fourth. This is a free photo sharing site that is linked to users' mobile camera and to other social networks for sharing pictures. Instagram was first introduced in 2010 and joined by around 30,000 people in 2015 (M. Duggan, N.B. Ellison, C. Lampe, A. Lenhart, M. Madden, 2015). Despite not being as popular in Vietnam as Facebook, Zalo, and Youtube, 52.3% students reported as its users are still a high record. This is comparable to the rate of Instagram users of 53% for the 18-29 age group (in the US) in a study by the University of Michigan (M. Duggan, N.B. Ellison, C. Lampe, A. Lenhart, M. Madden, 2015: 17).

The least popular sites joined by less than 6% survey people include Viber, Line, and Bigo Live.

To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' networking, we analyzed the number of friends, groups, and fanpages that the survey participants have on the five most popular sites, i.e. Facebook, Zalo, Youtube, Instagram,

and Google+. The results show that, on average, Facebook has the highest level of networking with the largest numbers of friends (938), groups (44.9), and fanpages (74.9 per person). The average number of friends on Facebook is 9 times bigger than those numbers for Zalo and Youtube, and 5 times bigger than that for Instagram. Google+ appears to be the networking site with the smallest number of friends (9). Almost students do not use this site for fanpage or group activities.

2. Locations and expenses for access to social networking service

Asking about the locations, 92.6% students answered that permanent residence (home) was where they often accessed to social networking sites. On the contrary, not many people (18.2%) use this service at school since concentration for study is required.

Only 4.8% of students accessed to social networking sites at cyber shops and 5.2% of them used the services at café. Previous research shows the development of the mobile market and internet infrastructure in Vietnam over the time has facilitated the access of the people in general and the students in particular to online services (Tran Huu Luyen, Tran Thi Minh Duc, Bui Thi Hong Thai, 2015: 215).

Where to access to the social networking service is also distinguished by the gender of students. Specifically, the number of male students (8.8%) using the services at cyber shops is 3.5 times bigger than that of female students (2.5%). It is opposite for the service access at home, when the females accounted for 94.6%, higher than 89.5% of the males. There

is not a big difference between the ratios of male and female students using networking services at school, that is 18.8% and 17.7% respectively. Further, both genders access to the services at café equally (5%). Research reasons that the different preferences in locations for networking service access are attributed to the distinctions of male and female behavioral culture. It is hardly to find a female student spending her whole time sitting in a cyber shop for 'entertainment' like a number of male counterparts, except for the business purpose. Female students often prefer private space like their home for the internet access (Tran Huu Luyen, Tran Thi Minh Duc, Bui Thi Hong Thai, 2015: 120).

The monthly expense for social networking service of a student is under VND 200,000. This is a quite reasonable amount of money for college students since most of them have not yet had an earned income and still receive financial supports from their families for tuition fees and living.

3. Electronic devices for social service access

The survey results show that a majority of students access to social networking sites via their mobile phones. In details, the numbers of students using their mobile phone for the services of Facebook, Zalo, and Instagram and for the services of Youtube and Google+ are 80% and 53% respectively.

Besides, laptops are also a popular device for cyber networking, particularly for Youtube and Google+, with the respective ratios of 47.7% and 42.6%. For Facebook

access, there are only 19.5% of students using their laptops while for Zalo and Instagram the number is even lower, just of 10%.

Students do not often use tablets and desktops for social networking service. The ratios of people using these two devices were respectively under 10% and under 5%.

The dominant internet service for accessing to social networking sites is the wireless network (WIFI) (91.4%). This is compatible with the result of most students using their mobile phones and laptops for social networking sites. Also, many students use the 3G/4G internet service with a ratio of 61.1%. The 3G/4G service is more convenient for mobility while still economical since most of mobile network operators provide students with an unlimited 3G internet package at VND 50,000-70,000 per month. This is the reason why quite a number of students use 3G/4G service to access social networking sites.

4. Amount of time spent and frequency of access on social networking sites

Survey students access to social networking sites at any time of the day (in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, and evening), up to 90% and more. Particularly, the ratio of students using social networking service was highest in the evening (96%) and was lowest in the afternoon (88%). This is because classes often operate in the morning and afternoon, so the evening is usually the students' free time. It can be seen also that they do not really have time constraint for social networking online, which nevertheless might lead to

the problem of poor management of their time over those sites.

In fact, the amount of daytime that students spent on social networking sites was very significant. On average, a student spent 6 hours per day during weekdays and 6.5 hours on Sundays on these sites. This finding is alarming since the students' risk of addiction to social networking service is really obvious.

Also, the average length of time of more than one hour for each login was substantial.

Spending too much time on social networking sites might produce adverse impacts on students' life. Study by Kuss and Griffiths on the relation between using Facebook and academic results concluded that Facebook users had lower grades and less

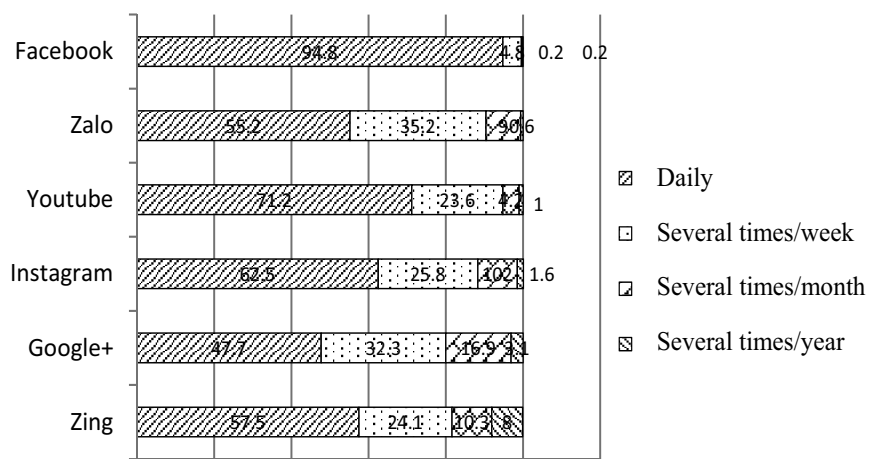
time for studying than non-users of social networking service. Among those, 26% of them reported that social networking sites affected their lives while the rest (74%) admitted the negative effects like delay, distraction, and poor time management (Kuss and Griffiths, 2011).

These statistics are worth considering since they show social networking service has been a great attraction to students. Instead of spending time building knowledge and professional skills, students dedicated 6 hours per day just for social networking

online. While, beside entertaining or chatting activities, there are undeniable benefits of social networking service as a source of common knowledge, the effectiveness of this information channel for the study purpose remains debatable.

Regarding the frequency of access, our analysis focuses on the six most popular social networking sites, namely Facebook, Zalo, Youtube, Instagram, Google+, and Zing. The results reveal that nearly all students participating in

Figure 2: Frequency of access for the most popular social networking sites



the survey (97.2%) accessed to one of these sites every day, same as the ratio of students logging daily onto 11 social networking sites mentioned above.

Facebook has the highest frequency of daily access (95%), followed by Youtube (71.2%) and Instagram (62.5%). Although Google+ is the least frequently visited, the ratio for this site is still significant (47.7%) (Figure 2).

Our finding is in line with a study in 2016 since Facebook was recognized as the most popular with 76% of its

users logging onto this site daily, which was a slight increase from 75% in 2015 (Shannon, Andrew, and Maeva, 2016).

II. Situation of students' utilization of information on social networking sites

1. Main themes of interest on social networking sites

Social networking sites have been the main sources of information and news for many people. Some certain topics that draw the students' interest most have been disclosed through our questionnaires. Among six assigned categories - (i) domestic and international news, (ii) political and security issues, (iii) scientific and life information, (iv) leisure interests (movies and music), (v) gender issues, and (vi) fashion and cosmetics - we asked students to select their three favorite themes. The results show that leisure interests are the greatest attraction to students with as ratio of 77.7%. Following this category are scientific and life information, domestic and international news, and fashion and cosmetics (of 48.7%, 44.5%, and 41.3% respectively).

Facebook is still the dominant site for students to obtain information online (with the ratios ranging from 68% to 82%, and the least favorite is information about ethnic minorities (68.1%) and the most-read is local news (81.4%)).

2. Purposes of obtaining information on social networking sites

Beside the functions of entertaining and connecting, social networking sites also serve different purposes of communication and information searching or study. Our survey results show 95% of students use social networking service for their study in addition to the entertaining

purpose (96.6%), such as group sharing or academic discussion. This is a positive side of using social networking service.

Furthermore, we found there was no distinctions in the frequency of using each social networking site for different purposes (i.e. eight purposes including entertainment, friend connection, study, information search, emotion and opinion expression, information sharing, employment seeking, and doing business). More specifically, Facebook remains the most frequently visited site for all of the purposes, with the highest rate for emotion and opinion sharing (90.8%) and the lowest rate for entertainments (77.5%). Zalo ranked second with the ratios for different purposes ranging from 42% to 64%. While Youtube has been a space for information sharing (31.5%) and emotion and opinion expression (34.8%), Instagram is more popular for entertainment, friend connection, employment seeking, doing business, and information search (from 30.2% to 37%).

III. Conclusion

Social networking service has become familiar to people by its multiple functions and variety of information sources. It allows users to receive and share information in an efficient and convenient way regardless of space, time, and generation gap. Our survey results can be briefed as follows:

- All of the students participating in the survey used social networking service, which might reflect the popularity of this service in the college student community. Most of the survey students joined two or more than two social networks.

- In descending order, the most popular sites among 11 social networking service providers mentioned in the survey are as follows: Facebook, Zalo, Youtube, Instagram, and Google+. Students used others less.

- The survey respondents mostly accessed to social networking sites at their residential location via smart phone. Laptop is also one of the most used device for social networking service, particularly for Youtube and Google+. While the wireless internet service was the most popular, the 3G/4G service was also favored by a significant number of users.

- The students from the survey logged onto social networking sites at any time of the day but mostly in the evening. On average, a student spent 6 hours during weekdays and 6.5 hours on Sundays for networking service.

- Leisure interests drew the most attention of the students, following by scientific and life information, domestic and international news, and fashion and cosmetics. The purposes of accessing to social networks in a descending order of importance are entertainment, friend connection, study, information search, emotion and opinion expression, information sharing, employment seeking, and doing business.

- A large number of students from the survey used social networking sites as information channels instead of social media. For the information related to culture, sports, and society, the ratio of people using networking sites was as high as using social media. Nevertheless, there is still cautiousness to the users for the trustworthiness of news and information

provided and shared on social networks.

In conclusion, the survey results reflect a comparatively clear picture of the students' information access via social networking service. These could serve as evidence for recommendations to students, schools and colleges, businesses, and media operators for an optimal utilization of information on social networking sites □

References

1. D. Boyd (2007), *Social Network site: Public, Private, or What?*, <https://www.danah.org/papers/KnowledgeTree.pdf>
2. M. Duggan, N.B. Ellison, C. Lampe, A. Lenhart, M. Madden (2015), *Social Media Update 2014: While Facebook remains the most popular site, other platforms see higher rates of growth*, Pew Research Center.
3. Priit Kalas (2018), *Top 15 most popular social networking sites and apps*, <https://www.dreamgrow.com/top-15-most-popular-social-networking-sites/>
4. D.J. Kuss, M.D. Griffiths (2011), "Excessive online social networking: Can adolescents become addicted to Facebook?", *Education and Health*, Vol.29 No.4.
5. Tran Huu Luyen, Tran Thi Minh Duc, Bui Thi Hong Thai (2015), *Social networking with students* (monographs), Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi.
6. G. Shannon, P. Andrew, D. Maeva (2016), *Social media update 2016: Facebook usage and engagement is on the rise, while adoption of other platforms holds steady*, Pew Research Center.