

“I don’t really post”: Comparing Actual and Reported Facebook Use Among College Students

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INTRODUCTION

Facebook is a daily part of many college students’ lives, with 90% having an account.³ Survey studies find daily self-reported Facebook use among young people; however, little is known about how their perceptions of use compare to actual activities.^{2,4} To date, the majority of studies on Facebook rely on self-report measures that are often unreliable.^{1,2} We assess how perceived Facebook use compares to logs of actual activity, shedding light on how best to measure this space where many young people spend time.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do college students use Facebook?

RQ2: Do self-reported Facebook activities and importance relate to actual Facebook use?

METHOD

Self-Report Measures

Facebook Importance (Survey)

“The following is a list of social media sites. Rate how important each of these sites is for you” (1=Not at all important; 5=Extremely important).

Self-Reported Facebook Use (Interviews)

Semi-structured interviews about how much students post on Facebook, their typical social media use and daily routines of technology use, and whether they use social media habitually.

Unobtrusive Measures

Computer and Phone Logs

Computer and phone activity captured for 7 days with Kidlogger (Windows) and AWARE Framework (Android) freeware. Recorded foregrounded windows/apps.

Facebook Logs

Custom Facebook application captured activity directly from Facebook accounts. The app only captured the type and amount of activity on the participant’s own wall (e.g., messages, posts, picture uploads, other “wall activity”); no content (e.g., photos) was captured.

Participants

College students (N=55). Due to software limitations, only Android and PC users. 4 participants had Facebook accounts but logged no activity during the week of observation.

MEASURES OF FACEBOOK USE

Participant Demographic Information

Variable	N	Mean (SD)	Range
Age (years)	55	19.38 (1.28)	18-23
Year in college	55	2.07 (1.05)	1-4
Cumulative GPA	55	2.92 (0.51)	1.78-3.92
Variable	N	% of Sample	
Gender			
Male	20	36.4%	
Female	35	63.6%	
Ethnicity			
Asian	24	43.6%	
Hispanic or Latino	17	30.9%	
White	8	14.6%	
Other	6	10.9%	

Analysis

RQ1:

- Summary statistics, correlations used to identify relationships among Facebook usage and activities.

RQ2:

- Interviews: open and *in situ* coding identified themes about participants’ beliefs about their Facebook use.
- ANOVA with Tukey HSD test and Wilcoxon rank sum tests used for importance of relationships among participants self-reported and actual Facebook use, Facebook importance and actual Facebook activities, and interview responses with Facebook use.

RQ1: FACEBOOK USE BY EMERGING ADULTS

College Students’ Facebook Use

Facebook Measures	M (SD)	Range
Avg Duration Per Day (Minutes)	30.79 (41.27)	0-194
Avg Visits Per Day	26.17 (32.34)	0-138
Avg Time Per Visit (Minutes)	1.43 (1.59)	0.06-9
Message Threads Per Week	7.65 (5.78)	0-25
Wall Activity Per Week (eg posts, uploads)	8.78 (8.50)	0-40
Number of Facebook Friends	471.04 (281.33)	92-1207
% of Network Interacted With Over Week	2.39% (1.99%)	0-69%
Likes Received on Wall Posts	7.98 (6.80)	0-40

Correlations of Between Facebook’s Importance and Use

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Facebook Importance	1.00					
2. Avg Duration Per Day (Min)	0.14	1.00				
3. Avg Visits Per Day	0.10	0.65**	1.00			
4. Avg Time Per Visit (Min)	0.01	0.38*	-0.14	1.00		
5. Wall Activity Per Week	0.55**	0.18	0.07	0.27+	1.00	
6. # of Facebook Friends	0.23+	0.19	0.12	0.17	0.48**	1.00

Note. +p<0.1 *, p<0.05 **, p<0.01

RQ2: ACTUAL VERSUS SELF-REPORTED FACEBOOK USE

How do Self-Reported Facebook Activities and Importance Relate to Actual Facebook Use?

Relationship Between Facebook’s Importance and Actual Use

Facebook importance	N	Avg Daily FB Visits	Avg Daily Time on FB (mins)	Avg Time/Visit (mins)
Not at all important	2	1	3.64	0.30
Somewhat or moderately important	28	27.17	31.29	1.60
Very or extremely important	25	27.07	32.71	1.35

Note. ANOVA with Tukey HSD test used to compare groups; no significant differences found.

Comparison of Self-Reported Facebook Use and Actual Use

Self-reported Facebook posting	N	Avg Daily FB Visits	Avg Daily Time on FB (mins)	Avg Time Per Visit (mins)	# FB Friends	FB Wall Activity	FB Message Threads
Rarely post	47	26.77	29.68	1.28	455.04	7.28**	7.21
Regularly post	8	22.65	37.35	2.24	565.00	17.63**	10.25

Note. Wilcoxon rank sum tests used to compare those who reported in interviews “rarely posting” versus those who reported posting on a regular basis. ** p<0.01

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“I don’t really post” Represents Varied Use:

“I don’t really post status updates, I rarely post updates. I just go on just to check up on what people are doing and see what other statuses are popping up or if there are any events happening.” – male, 22 instances of wall activity, 74.65 average minutes on Facebook/day, 86.33 average daily Facebook visits

“I don’t really post status on my wall unless it’s something really big and I’m like really excited about.” – female, 8 instances of wall activity, 4.52 average minutes of Facebook/day, 3.8 average daily Facebook visits.

“It varies on whether or not I did something interesting. But I don’t really do statuses as often. I probably do statuses like once a month or like twice a month. I don’t really post a lot.” – female, 5 instances of wall activity, 64.1 average minutes on Facebook/day, 80.4 average daily Facebook visits.

Note. M=8.78 wall activity; M=30.79 average mins on Facebook/day; M=26.17 average daily Facebook visits

DISCUSSION

- College students visit Facebook often and spend over half an hour on the site each day; however they may be unaware of the degree to which they use Facebook, commonly reporting that they “don’t really post.”
- There is a need to understand how students view Facebook (e.g. “not really using Facebook” may still mean regular use). Traditional measures (surveys) may not capture students’ actual use. The discrepancy between self-reported measures and logged activity is important given that almost all research on Facebook use relies on self-report.
- Mixed methods are important to understand how Facebook use fits in college students’ lives. Our use of interviews, surveys, and computer/phone logs helped show how college students use Facebook and how they quantify their use.
- Facebook importance does not differentiate how often or how much time students use Facebook; this finding suggests the need to explore purposes of Facebook use rather than simply measuring how often and for how long.
- Future studies should examine larger populations including non-students to explore how self-reported and actual Facebook use change over time and whether these differences or changes predict academic/social outcomes.

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