

# Gender differences regarding the use of Facebook by Greek users: Implications for marketing

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## Abstract:

*Facebook has become a spectacular success by creating a massive new domain in which millions of social interactions are played out every day. This burgeoning new sphere of social behavior is inherently fascinating, but it also provides an unprecedented opportunity for companies and marketing managers: a) to observe behavior in a naturalistic setting, b) to follow the preferences of users worldwide regarding a great variety of subjects and fields, and c) to form customized and personalized campaigns based on gender differences. The aim of the present study is to perform a survey in order to examine if there are significant gender differences regarding: i. the reasons that men and women are using Facebook for, ii. the frequency that they are checking their Facebook profile, and iii. the number of their Facebook friends. The results showed that there are no significant gender differences in all three research questions. Based on the data collected from the survey, possible implications for marketing managers were formed.*

*Keywords:* Social media, Facebook, gender differences, Greece

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite its rather short history, Internet has managed to revolutionize and change entirely almost every aspect of our society. A very large number of Internet users worldwide are attracted by Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc. Social Networking Sites are defined as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

According to eBizMBA Rank, which is a constantly updated average of each website's Alexa Global Traffic Rank, and U.S. Traffic Rank from both Compete and Quantcast, the 5 most popular Social Networking Sites (at 24/02/2014) worldwide are presented in Table 1 (eBizMBA, 2014):

**Table 1:** Top 5 most popular Social Networking Sites worldwide

Rank	Social Networking Site	Estimated Unique Monthly Visitors
1	Facebook	900.000.000
2	Twitter	310.000.000
3	LinkedIn	250.000.000
4	Pinterest	150.000.000
5	Google Plus+	120.000.000

It is quite clear, from the data of Table 1, that Facebook dominates the realm of SNSs (Facebook's unique monthly visitors are more than the population of Europe), not only because it is in the first place, far beyond the reach of Twitter which is ranked second, but also because its estimated number of unique monthly visitors is bigger even than the sum of the estimated number of unique monthly visitors of the other four SNSs. In March 2010, Facebook passed Google to become the most visited website in the United States, accounting for 7.07% of all U.S. web traffic (Dougherty, 2010). In short, since its creation in February 2004, Facebook has become a spectacular success by creating a massive new domain in which millions of social interactions are played out every day. This burgeoning new sphere of social behavior is inherently fascinating, but it also provides an unprecedented opportunity for companies and marketing managers: a) to observe behavior in a naturalistic setting, b) to follow the preferences of users worldwide regarding a great variety of subjects and fields, and c) to form customized and personalized campaigns based on gender differences.

The aim of the present study is twofold: a) to perform a survey in order to examine if there are significant gender differences regarding: i. the reasons that men and women are using Facebook for, ii. the frequency that they are

checking their Facebook profile, and iii. the number of their Facebook friends, and b) to form and present, based on the data collected from the survey, possible implications for marketing managers. The paper is organized as follows: first, a short overview of Facebook is presented. Next based on the existing literature the research questions are discussed, followed by methodology and findings. Finally, conclusions, some implications for marketing and limitations are highlighted.

## 2. CONTENT - OVERVIEW OF FACEBOOK AND REASONS FOR STUDYING IT

Facebook is currently the most popular friend-networking site, which was created originally as a forum for college students. It is designed primarily to help people in building online presences and social networks (Tosun, 2012). More specifically, Facebook consists of a series of interrelated profile pages in which members post a broad range of information about themselves and link their own profile to others' profiles. The core of the Facebook experience centers on users' ability to (a) post self-relevant information on an individualized profile page, (b) link to other members and create a "friends" list, and (c) interact with other members (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Hoy and Milne, 2010; Tufekci, 2008; Wilson, Gosling and Graham, 2012).

Major features that promote communication include a "message" system that allows for private communication and a "wall" system that allows for a more public form of communication (Grimmelmann, 2009). In addition, a "home" page provides a central hub where up-to-date information pertaining specifically to each user is displayed, including a personalized events calendar and a "news feed" where recent content contributions by friends are shown in chronological order. Users can post photographs and "tag" other users in photos. With the click of a button, users can "poke" a friend (e.g., send a content-free notification of positive communication, rather like saying "Hi") or "like" a comment or picture (to indicate approval), presenting users with a quick and easy form of social interaction. Users can buy and sell items in the Marketplace and find entertainment on the Games page (Wilson, Gosling and Graham, 2012).

Perhaps the feature that most differentiates Facebook from other SNSs is the Facebook Platform, which allows third parties to develop applications and permits other websites to integrate with Facebook through Open Graph (Gjoka, Sirivianos, Markopoulou, & Yang, 2008). Applications are small programs designed specifically for Facebook that encompass a wide variety of forms, including games, polls, quizzes, and fan pages.

There are two broad reasons why Facebook is of great relevance to marketing managers. First, activities performed on Facebook (e.g., connecting to others, expressing preferences, providing status updates) can leave a wealth of concrete, observable data in their wake. Advertisers have taken note of SNSs and are using the content provided in user profiles to target consumers with individually tailored ads. These tailored ads can be based on a general profile demographic, such as sending local bridal shop ads to women whose relationship status is "engaged". Using the "friends of connections" tool, advertisers can target Facebook users whose friends are connected to specific pages, groups, or applications. These tactics represent a few of the many forms of behavioral tracking of consumers' activities online, which also involve "searches the consumer has conducted, the Web pages visited, and the content viewed-in order to deliver advertising targeted to the individual consumer's interests" (Hoy and Milne, 2010). This activity, known as behavioral marketing or behavioral advertising, typically takes place without users' awareness.

Second, the rise of Facebook brings both new benefits and dangers to society which warrants careful consideration. The benefits associated with Facebook, such as the strengthening of social ties, are tempered by concerns about privacy and information disclosure (Wilson, Gosling and Graham, 2012). When advertisers use the personal information found on Facebook profiles to deliver personalized ads, the usage of that information extends beyond what the Facebook user originally intended: to develop and maintain social connections. As such, users may experience heightened privacy concerns when they become aware of the practice (Hoy and Milne, 2010). Many Facebook users and consumers consider this behavior unacceptable and a violation of their privacy (Turow et al., 2009).

## 3. GENDER DIFFERENCES REGARDING THE USE OF FACEBOOK: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Facebook use motives

Wilson, Gosling and Graham (2012) conducted a comprehensive literature research study on the subject of Facebook, identifying 412 relevant articles, which were sorted into 5 categories: motivations for using Facebook, descriptive analysis of users, identity presentation, the role of Facebook in social interactions, and privacy and information disclosure. Based on the results of their study, the most common motivation discussed in the literature for the use of Facebook was users' desire to connect and to communicate with people one has met or befriended offline, and to a lesser degree (for the opportunity) to investigate new others (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2006; Joinson, 2008; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield, 2006; Sheldon, 2008; Tosun, 2012). Other common motives for using Facebook are: for romantic purposes (Pennington, 2009), for photo sharing (posting photos, commenting on photos, tagging photos, etc.) (Gülnar, Balci, and Çakır, 2010; Pennington, 2009), for checking out what other people are doing (Rau, Gao, and Ding, 2008), and for entertainment (Boyd, 2008; Pennington, 2009).

It seems that there are very few papers that studied possible differences between genders regarding the motives for using Facebook. Hoy and Milne (2010), state that both genders are equally using social media to stay in contact with friends and family (79%), but college women update their profiles (82%) and post pictures (46%) more frequently than do their male counterparts (65% and 35%, respectively). They are also more likely than men to comment on someone else's blog (27% versus 18%). In their study, Gülnar, Balci, and Çakır (2010) explored the motives of the users of personal photo/video sharing websites like YouTube and Facebook. The results of their research revealed 7 motives that have effects on the use of photo/video sharing websites: narcissism and self expression, media drenching and performance, passing time, information seeking, personal status, relationship maintenance, and entertainment. In relation to gender differences, male subjects attached more importance to narcissism and self expression motivators while females preferred information seeking and relationship maintenance. Based on the above results, it seems that males and females are equally using social media to stay in contact with friends and family (the most common motivation discussed in the literature), but they differ on other motives. In order to study the existence of possible differences between genders regarding the motives for using Facebook in Greek reality, the following research question will be investigated:

RQ1: Are there any differences between genders regarding the motives for using Facebook? If yes, then what are these differences?

### **3.2 Frequency of checking Facebook profile**

Regarding the subject of gender differences on the frequency that they check their Facebook profiles, Hoy and Milne (2010), in their research study that examined gender differences in young adults' privacy beliefs, their reactions to behavioral advertising, personal information-sharing behaviors, and privacy protection behaviors on social networks, the results showed that women did check their Facebook profiles more frequently than men, with 78.6% of them checking it several times per day compared with 67.7% of men. However, females reported spending a greater percentage of their daily Internet time on Facebook ( $M = 61.7\%$ ,  $SD = 27.1$ ) than males ( $M = 44.0\%$ ,  $SD = 27.4$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Two years later, Thompson, and Lougheed (2012) conducted an exploratory study of gender differences in social network communication among undergraduate men and women. Their results revealed that for those participants who reported having Facebook accounts (94%), there were no significant differences by gender for daily minutes on Facebook ( $M = 106.8$ ,  $SD = 120.3$ ). The results of the two aforementioned studies are contradictory. In order to study the existence of possible differences between genders regarding the frequency that they check their Facebook profiles in Greek reality, the second research question is formed:

RQ2: Are there any differences between genders regarding the frequency that they check their Facebook profile?

### **3.3 Number of Facebook friends**

Another important issue of Facebook use with several marketing implications for companies and organizations is the number of Facebook friends. Regarding the subject of gender differences on the number of their Facebook friends, the study of Hoy and Milne (2010) yielded that there were no significant gender differences in the average number of friends (Men: Average = 474.7, Median = 402, Range = 25-1500 vs. Women: Average = 523.5, Median = 472.75, Range = 28-2000). The same results were revealed in the study of Thompson, and Lougheed (2012). The participants of the study noted an average of 587 Facebook friends with no significant differences in number of friends by gender. Thus, in the case of number of Facebook friends the results are matched, showing no gender differences. In order to investigate the existence of possible differences between genders regarding the number of their Facebook friends, the following research question is formed:

RQ3: Are there any differences between genders regarding the number of their Facebook friends?

## **4. METHOD**

### **4.1 Survey design, sampling and participants**

The current study utilized a structured questionnaire in order to measure: a) demographics of the sample, and b) possible differences between genders regarding the motives for using Facebook, the frequency of checking Facebook profile, and the number of Facebook friends. The survey was designed in Greek and the questionnaire was distributed in several cities of Greece. During the data collection period (August 15 – September 18, 2013), a total of 220 respondents took part in the study. However, the sample size included in the analyses (except descriptive results) was dropped to 185 responses due to the fact that 35 participants stated that they don't have a Facebook account. Of the 220 respondents, 53.2% were women and 46.8% were men (of the 185 respondents, 54.6% were women and 45.4% were men).

### **4.2 Questionnaire structure**

The structured questionnaire used for the purposes of the current study included 19 questions in total and it was divided in two sections. The first section was designed to obtain demographic sample data and it was composed of 6 questions

(gender, age, level of studies, profession, marital status and location). The second section was designed to obtain data regarding the research questions of the current study and it was composed of 13 questions.

## 5. RESULTS

### 5.1 Sample profile

Participants (N=220) were all Greek nationals with a range of age from 15 to 40+ years. Almost 70% of the respondents were in the age group from 15 to 29 (15-19, 31.4% / 20-24, 10% / 25-29, 27.7%), while almost 50% had a university degree (bachelor, master, PhD, post PhD). Regarding profession of the participants, 29.1% were employees in the private sector, 17.7% students, 13.6% freelancers, 5.9% employees in the public sector, 5.5% business men and 28.2% unemployed. Less than half of the respondents (41.3%) were single (38.6%) or divorced (2.7%), while the rest 58.7% were either in a relationship (33.7%), engaged (4.5%), or married (20.5%). In relation to the location of the participants, 69.5% were located in Thessaloniki, 2.3% in Athens, 17.7% in other urban areas and 10.5% in rural areas. Some crosstabs were run in order to check if there are differences between genders on the subjects of profession, level of studies and location. The results revealed a very similar distribution in all subcategories of the aforementioned subjects between genders.

### 5.2 Gender differences on motives for using Facebook

Participants were asked to state both the most important motive (single choice), as well as all possible motives (multiple choice) for creating and using a Facebook account. The results showed that the most important motive (for both genders) for creating and using a Facebook account was “Finding old friends and communicating with them” (25.9%). This result is aligned with the finding of Wilson, Gosling and Graham’s (2012) study that the most common motivation discussed in the literature for the use of Facebook was users’ desire to connect and to communicate with people one has met or befriended offline.

Regarding gender differences on the subject of all possible motives (multiple choice) for creating and using a Facebook account, the results (presented in Table 2) revealed that there are no significant differences between genders ( $n = 185$ ,  $\chi^2 = 7.550$ , d.f. = 11,  $p = 0.753$ ). Chi square tests were also used for each motive separately and once again the results showed that there are no significant differences between genders.

**Table 2:** Motives for creating and using a Facebook account between genders

	Gender			
	Men		Women	
	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Finding & Communicating with old friends	44	52.4%	60	59,4%
Finding & Communicating with new friends	26	31.0%	20	19,8%
Finding love partner	8	9.5%	6	5,9%
Following the activity of certain people	13	15.5%	16	15,8%
Playing Games	14	16.7%	22	21,8%
Getting an update on happenings	19	22,6%	24	23,8%
Getting an update of the latest news	24	28,6%	28	27,7%
Communication and chat with other users	31	36,9%	35	34,7%
To share thoughts with other people	11	13,1%	11	10,9%
To become a member in several groups	6	7,1%	11	10,9%
Other	9	10,7%	7	6,9%

### 5.3 Gender differences on the frequency of checking their Facebook profile

Participants were asked to state how often they check their Facebook profile on a weekly basis. The results (presented in Table 3) showed that 50% of men check their Facebook profile on a daily basis, while the respective percentage for the women of the sample is 59.4%. This result is highlighting the high penetration of SNSs, and more specifically of Facebook, in the daily lives of the participants of the sample. The Pearson Chi square test revealed that there are no significant differences between genders ( $n = 185$ ,  $\chi^2 = 2.697$ , d.f. = 4,  $p = 0.610$ ). Moreover, the participants were asked to state the time of day that they usually check their Facebook profile. The results were very interesting since they showed that 41.1% of the respondents are checking their Facebook profile from 20:01 to 00:00, while another 24.3% from 16:01 to 20:00.

**Table 3:** Frequency of checking Facebook profile between genders

	Check of Facebook Profile/week					Total
	Less than once a week	1-2 times/week	3-4 times/week	5-6 times/week	Daily	
Gender	Men	5	10	13	14	84
	Women	7	12	10	12	60
Total		12	22	23	26	185

#### 5.4 Gender differences on the number of their Facebook friends

Participants were asked to state the number of Facebook friends that they have. The results (presented in Table 4) showed that the majority (60.7%) of men have less than 500 Facebook friends (1-250, 28.6% / 251-500, 32.1%), while the respective percentage for the women of the sample is 64.4% (1-250, 33.7% / 251-500, 30.7%). This is a very interesting finding since it delineates a certain precaution of the respondents on accepting and adding Facebook friends. The above conclusion is further evidenced by the results of the question “What criteria do you have in order to accept a friend request?”, which showed that 65.6% of the respondents accept friend requests only from people that they know from the real world and only 11.3% answered that they accept all friend requests. Also in the case of the number of Facebook friends, the Pearson Chi square test revealed that there are no significant differences between genders ( $n = 185$ ,  $\chi^2 = 4.346$ , d.f. = 4,  $p = 0.361$ ).

**Table 4:** Number of Facebook friends between genders

	Number of Facebook friends					Total
	1 -250	251-500	501-750	751-1000	Over 1000	
Gender	Men	24	27	9	7	84
	Women	34	31	12	13	101
Total		58	58	21	20	185

## 6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research study yielded a number of findings which make a triple contribution to the international literature: a) it identifies the extent to which there are gender differences regarding the use of Facebook by Greek users, b) based on the results, it provides some practical and useful implications for marketing, and c) it extends the current literature on the specific subject. The main findings reflected in the results of the current research study are the following. First, in line with previous theorizing on SNSs and their unique advantage of facilitating social connectivity (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2006; Joinson, 2008; Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield, 2006; Sheldon, 2008; Tosun, 2012; Wilson, Gosling and Graham, 2012), our findings show that the most important motive (for both genders) for creating and using a Facebook account was social connection with old friends. On the subject of all possible motives for creating and using a Facebook account, it seems that there are no significant gender differences.

Second, the findings regarding the frequency of checking their Facebook profile reveal that there are no differences between men and women. This finding is in line with the findings of the study of Thompson, and Lougheed (2012), but is contradictory with the data presented in the paper of Hoy and Milne (2010). It is noteworthy that the specific finding revealed the high penetration power and the direct impact of Facebook in the daily lives of Greek Facebook users of the sample.

Third, once again in line with previous research studies (Hoy and Milne, 2010; Thompson, and Lougheed, 2012) the results show no significant gender differences on the number of their Facebook friends, even though the majority of the participants of the specific study have less than 500 Facebook friends which is in contradiction with the average of 587 Facebook friends that the participants of Thompson, and Lougheed's (2012) study had. Another interesting finding is the existence of a certain precaution of the participants in the study on accepting and adding Facebook friends which is further evidenced by the fact that 2/3 of them accept friend requests only from people they know from the real world.

Some findings of the current study can lead to several interesting as well as important implications for marketing managers: (a) The finding that both men and women share the same, more or less, motives for using Facebook, combined with the information that the most important motive for creating and using a Facebook account is social connection with old friends, leads to the suggestion that marketing managers need to target Greek Facebook users through more personalized communication channels and word of mouth marketing techniques (e.g. marketing managers should try to connect with Facebook users that belong to their company's target group through their own (or their friends') personal contacts and then spread information, promote their own offers, coupons, and competitions, communicate virally their own company news and advertise their own products via personal chat and status updates).

(b) The fact that the majority of the participants (55.1%) check their Facebook profile on a daily basis highlights the opportunity for marketing managers and advertisers to have Facebook daily presence on Facebook (through daily status updates and paid advertisements) in order to build their brand name-image and to consolidate a higher level of relationship with their targeted Facebook users.

(c) The finding that the majority of the participants (65.4%) usually check their Facebook profiles from 16:00 to 00:00 leads to the suggestion that marketing managers and advertisers should upload their Facebook ads or their Facebook marketing campaigns during those times of the day, and more preferably from 20:00 to 23:00. It is important to note, that marketing managers and advertisers need to know more information about several demographic characteristic of the targeted Facebook users (like for example their age distribution, their marital status, their professional status, etc.) in order to be able to plan in an a more successful way the time of their Facebook uploads, since the time of the upload is largely connected to those characteristics.

The current study has a few limitations that are worth noting. First, the size of the sample is relatively small thus limiting the generalizability of the results to the whole population. Second, the range of demographics is narrow which is also a fact that limits generalizability. If a sample with demographic diversity were initially specified, it might help ensure a more diverse sample in the end. Third, current study surveys only Facebook users about their purposes for using Facebook, but do not survey non-Facebook users about their reasons for not using Facebook. An avenue for future research can be surveying non-Facebook users since non-Facebook users can provide additional insights.

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