

# An Exploratory Model of Student Engagement in Social Networking Sites in Higher Education Institutions

## ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNSs) are gaining popularity and use among students in higher education institutions. Based on the design principles, feature usability and interactivity, and affordability, these sites offer a variety of opportunities to support student engagement and student learning. Despite the potential technological and pedagogical advantages of social networking, and the widespread usage among students, current research on social networking indicates that the use of SNSs for academic purposes is still significantly limited. This study is conducted with the aim of developing a model for student engagement in social networking sites. To carry out the research, mixed methods were employed in three main stages. First, conceptual model was developed based on a review of the literature on student engagement. Second, the model was refined based on a case study research design. Third, the model was tested using a quantitative survey. In the exploratory stage, case study with multiple methods were applied including an exploratory survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions in order to investigate the current state of student engagement in the social networking context and to build the constructs and hypotheses. The case study findings ascertained that students' use of Facebook for academic purposes was limited; accordingly, an exploratory model of student engagement SNSs was proposed. In the validation stage using a quantitative survey, five key factors of student engagement in the social networking context in a model showing the related paths and relationships were identified and tested. Technological functionality, faculty involvement, peer involvement, and student interest were found to be significantly related to student engagement in the social networking context, while no significant relationship was found between institutional support and student engagement in the social networking context. In addition, technological functionality and peer involvement were found to have a positive direct effect on student interest. Peer involvement was found to be influenced positively by faculty involvement, and had a significant mediation effect on the relationship between faculty involvement and student engagement in the social networking context. This research contributes to the body of knowledge in both theoretical development, and for Information System and education practitioners. The proposed model can be helpful for higher education institutions and educators as well as Information System researchers undertaking further explorative studies in the use of SNSs in the academic setting and for further confirmatory studies of student engagement in the social networking context.