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FACEBOOK CONTACTS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND THEIR LECTURERS: DEVELOPMENT AND PERCEPTION

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Abstract

There is still an ongoing discussion about the academic use of Facebook and how students and their lecturers should interact with each other on such social private networks. In the presented empirical study we investigated not only how and why Facebook contacts between students and their lecturers (hereinafter referred to as SL-contacts) were developed, but also how students and lecturers with and without SL-contacts estimated the current situation.

We addressed our research questions by means of an online survey with 2849 participants (2550 students and 299 lecturers). Only 460 persons (333 students and 127 lecturers) reported about SL-contacts. The majority of 2389 participants (2217 students and 172 lecturers) had no SL-contacts.

The results of the participants with SL-contacts showed that reasons for sending a SL-contact request were mainly sympathy and the assumption that it was okay for the other one. Also the acceptance of a SL-contact request was mainly based on sympathy and the assumption that the acceptance of the request was the normal reaction. The denial of a SL-contact request was a very seldom exception and was mainly done in order to keep distance or because the SL-contact was seen as inappropriate. Remarkably, the development of SL-contacts was not connected with academic information on Facebook.

Asked for the status quo of having SL-contacts, the participants with SL-contacts reported that they had also a friendship outside the internet or that it did not matter if they have SL-contacts among their other Facebook contacts. The answers of participants without SL-contacts on the status quo (of not having SL-contacts) were partly mixed. On the one hand, they reported that they simply had never thought of having SL-contacts and that it was not due to lack of sympathy. On the other hand, they also felt that SL-contacts are somehow inappropriate. In relation to the latter finding it remains an open question if the feeling of inappropriateness was the reason or the consequence of having no SL-contacts.

Overall, our results suggest that SL-contacts are handled and perceived similar to normal Facebook contacts. Thereby, the existing own SL-contacts are seen rather positive and mainly based on interest and sympathy, but less on academic purposes. Accordingly, SL-contacts seemed to be more a private and less a work-related matter.

Keywords: Facebook contacts between students and their lecturers, social media, online communication, social interaction.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the popularity of social media, the formal and informal scholarly communication has changed. Academics use social networks for professional purposes and thereby social networks promote information sharing in formal and informal ways [1]. One popular social network is Facebook and there are various discussions and studies on this media phenomenon [2]. Overall, Facebook is used for different purposes, namely to stay in touch with old and new friends, for studying and dating [3] as well as browsing through newsfeeds and friends profile-sites [4]. That means Facebook is not only for private communication, but also for information search. Accordingly, also universities and academics are using Facebook. Students consider Facebook as a tool for private social interaction and use it to get away from study [5]. This is in line with the findings of Karl and Peluchette [6] that college students perceived friend requests from professors on Facebook often negatively because they liked to use such online social networks for private matters. In contrast, Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds [7] found that teachers' self-disclosure on Facebook can have positive effects on the classroom climate.

Against this background, there is an ongoing discussion about the academic use of Facebook [8]. Overall, the reviews of Hew [9] and Manca and Ranieri [10] concluded that Facebook is used mainly for social purposes and less for teaching and learning. Similar, Madge, Meek, Wellens, and Hooley [5] argued that Facebook can be seen as “social glue” of the university life. Recent findings support this view and showed that also contacts between students and their lecturers are estimated rather positive [11]. Thereby it remains an open question how and why students and their lecturers connect with each other on Facebook and how such connections are judged. The following study investigated Facebook contacts between students and their lecturers (herein after referred as SL-contacts) and provided first insights how such contacts were established and perceived. Thereby, we investigated not only the perception of students and lecturers with own SL-contacts, but also the perception of students and lecturers without SL-contacts.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Questions

The overall research aim of our study was twofold. On the one hand, we investigated the background of the development of SL-contacts, i.e., what were the associated reasons and thoughts when SL-contacts were developed. On the other hand, we explored how students and lecturers (with and without own SL-contacts) perceive the current situation.

RQ1 – Development of SL-contacts. The first research question RQ1 related to the development of SL-contact and included the following aspects:

- Own initiative (i.e., sending a SL-contact request): What was the background for sending a SL-contact request? How was it perceived when the own SL-contact request was accepted or declined?
- Other’s initiative (i.e., receiving a SL-contact request): How was the SL-contact request perceived? What was the background for the acceptance or denial of a SL-contact request?

RQ2 – Perception of the status quo. The second research question RQ2 relates to the view of the status quo for having or not having SL-contacts:

- How are the own existing SL-contacts described? (Participants with SL-contacts)
- What is the background for not having SL-contacts? (Participants without SL-contacts)

2.2 Description of the Questionnaire

The data were assessed by an online-survey that was newly constructed. Thus, we made several pre-tests including an internal and external quality-control, pre-tests with some students in the laboratory, and technical tests. Prerequisites for participation were that the people were either students or lecturers and had a Facebook-profile. The participation was voluntary. As reward for participation we offered a lottery to win vouchers of a popular online-store. The wording of the questionnaire was analogously for students and lectures, only the words “students” and “lecturers” were exchanged (for example: “It is okay for me if my students add me on Facebook.” / “It is okay for me if my lecturers add me on Facebook.”). The questionnaire started for all participants with an introduction of the topic, information about the survey and about privacy issues including the anonymity of the assessed data. Additionally, we explicitly asked for open, honest and accurate answers, and explained that there are no right or wrong for answers. The first questions served as filters to distinguish between students versus lectures and between participants with versus without SL-contacts. Additionally, we asked if they have ever received or sent a SL-contact request and how the request was handled (accepted, declined, ignored). Subsequent to these filter-questions, the participants received different questions depending on their answers.

The questions on RQ1 related to reasons, thoughts, and reactions in the context of sending and receiving a SL-contact request. The items were formulated as statements (e.g., “I add my students/lecturers if I want to reduce the distance between us.”) that had to be rated on a 5-point Likert-scale from “1 – doesn’t apply at all” until “5 – applies totally”. Regarding the own initiative (i.e., sending a SL-contacts request), we presented separate items on the background of sending a request (s1 to s14), on the perception of the acceptance of the own request (pa1 to pa6), and on the perception of the denial of the own request (pd1 to pd7). Regarding the others initiative (i.e., receiving

a SL-contact request), we presented items on the perception of the other's SL-contact request (pr1 to pr14), on the reasons and thoughts related to the acceptance of the other's request (a1 to a6), and on the background of the denial of the other's request (d1 to d7).

The questions on the status quo (RQ2) differed in dependence if a participant had or had no SL-contacts. However, as far as possible and reasonable the items for the participants with SL-contact (w1 to w21) and the participants without SL-contacts (n1 to n24) related to the same issues, i.e., partly the identical aspects with similar wording were asked. For example: "I feel it is interesting to see what my students / lecturers do outside the university." (w3) / "I have no interest to know what my students / lecturers do outside the university." (n5).

Subsequently, all participants received some (identical) additional questions on SL-contacts that will not be presented here because they are out of scope of this paper (and were already reported [11]). Finally, we assessed control variables on sociodemographic aspects (age, gender, etc.), institution and faculty, the importance of politeness, social desirability), the opinion about the hierarchy between students and lecturers, and on the individual Facebook usage (frequency, number of contacts etc.).

2.3 Recruitment of Participants and Description of the Sample

We recruited students and lecturers across Germany. Therefore we contacted several universities and colleges and requested them to forward the announcement of the online-questionnaire to the university members (including staff and students) or to post an announcement of the questionnaire on their Facebook-site. Additionally, we announced the survey on websites related with the affiliation of the first author.

Overall, the sample comprised 2849 participants. Most of them were students (2250 persons; 89.50%) at the mean age of 24.04 years. The lecturers within the sample (299 persons) were rather young with a mean age of 33.93 years and were mainly PhD students (42%). The group of students contained more females (63%) than males (37%). For the lecturers the gender distribution was nearly equal. At average the participants had their account for 4.67 years and the majority used it daily (60%) or several times a week (24%). Only 16% of the sample reported about SL-contacts (460 persons: 333 students and 127 lecturers). The majority of 84% (2389 persons: 2217 students and 172 lecturers) had no SL-contacts. Thereby, there were substantial differences between students and lecturers: Only 12% of the students had SL-contacts, while 43% of the lecturers reported about their own SL-contacts. Table 1 shows the distribution of the participants across students versus lecturers and participants with versus without SL-contacts.

Table 1. Sample description.

Academic status	With SL-contacts	Without SL-contacts	All
Students	333	2217	2550
Lecturers	127	172	299
All	460	2389	2849

Please note that there were no forced answers. Thus, the number of valid cases was partly lower due to omitted questions. We found no evidence that the assessed control variables influenced the pattern of results reported in this paper.

3 RESULTS

The items of the survey were not theoretically derived but rather aimed at first explorative insights. Thus, the means of the ratings on the five-point Likert-scale were analysed in a descriptive way as follows:

- Means between 2.5 and 3.5 indicated that the participants were indifferent (neither true nor untrue) regarding the statement of the item.
- Means below 2.5 indicated that the participants disagreed with the statement.
- Means higher 3.5 indicated that the participants agreed with the statement.

Remark: As control analysis we calculated also t-tests for differences between the means and the middle-point (3) of the scale. However, due to the relatively large sample nearly all items showed

significant differences even though there was only a very small absolute difference. Thus, we decided to use the more “conservative” criteria described above.

Additionally, we compared the answers of students versus lecturers by t-test in order to investigate if the patterns of agreement and disagreement were different.

3.1 Results on RQ1 – Development of SL-Contacts

The following results are based on the data of the participants with SL-contacts. As mentioned above, the questions on the development of SL-contact requests depended on the preceding answers of the participants. For this reason, the numbers of valid answers were partly very low. (Remark: An analysis of the participants without SL-contacts was not possible because of empty cells. That means none of the persons without SL-contacts answered the related questions of the survey – even though it was theoretically possible in case of rejection of SL-contact requests.)

3.1.1 Own Initiative

Overall, 198 participants reported that they have sent requests. Thereby, 168 reported about acceptance, 1 person reported about rejection, and 20 persons indicated their requests were partly accepted and partly declined. (Additionally, 195 persons reported they never have sent a request and 42 people did not remember.)

✦ *Sending a SL-contact request*

Asked for the background of initiating SL-contacts, the participants agreed with the statements that they sent SL-contact requests if they thought that it is okay for the other one (s2) and because they had sympathy for the other one (s7). The participants disagreed with the statements that they added the other one because they wanted to make friendship (s9), to reduce distance (s4) or to make a friendship offer (s10). There was also disagreement with the statements that they feared their request could be rejected (s6), that they simply tried it out (s1) or that they made the contact request after the course was finished. Furthermore, academic information on Facebook (s13) was not a reason for the SL-contact. For the other statements, there was neither agreement nor disagreement. The comparison of students and lecturers showed significant differences for the statements s6 ($t = 2.97$; $p = .005$), s7 ($t = 2.37$; $p = .005$), and s14 ($t = 2.18$; $p = .031$). However, for s6 and s14 this difference had no relevance since students as well as lecturers both disagreed to the statements. The pattern of agreement was only changed in the case of s7: Students added their lecturers because they liked them. However, lecturers were indifferent about this reason. Table 2 shows the statistical values for the items on sending a SL-contact request.

Table 2. Sending a SL-contact request.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
s1 - Spontaneous	143	2.42 (0.12)	121	2.50 (1.41)	22	1.95 (1.33)
s2 - Okay (assumed)	148	4.03 (0.10)	125	4.10 (1.01)	23	3.61 (1.73)
s3 - Interest	147	2.68 (0.11)	124	2.73 (1.33)	23	2.39 (1.12)
s4 - Reduce distance	147	2.45 (0.10)	124	2.52 (1.30)	23	2.04 (1.02)
s5 - Rarely & inhibitions	145	2.95 (0.12)	122	3.02 (1.42)	23	2.57 (1.53)
s6 - Fear of rejection	148	1.89 (0.10)	125	1.98 (1.28)	23	1.39 (0.78)
s7 - Sympathy	149	3.74 (0.11)	126	3.87 (1.22)	23	3.04 (1.58)
s8 - Appreciation	147	2.63 (0.12)	125	2.74 (1.37)	22	2.05 (1.40)
s9 - Wish for friendship	148	1.76 (0.10)	125	1.78 (1.20)	23	1.70 (1.36)
s10 - Friendship offer	147	2.27 (0.12)	124	2.23 (1.37)	23	2.43 (1.59)
s11 - Sympathy (assumed)	146	2.78 (0.11)	123	2.79 (1.37)	23	2.74 (1.29)
s12 - Existing friendship	146	2.88 (0.13)	123	2.85 (1.53)	23	3.00 (1.68)
s13 - Academic information	151	2.36 (0.12)	127	2.41 (1.40)	24	2.08 (1.53)
s14 - Course finished	145	2.48 (0.13)	123	2.59 (1.55)	22	1.82 (1.47)

✦ *Perception of the acceptance of the own SL-contact request*

Asked how it was perceived when the own SL-contact request was accepted, the participants agreed with the statements that this was normal (pa1) and that they were pleased (pa3). They disagreed with the statements that they were surprised (pa5) or that they assumed the other had inhibitions to decline the request (pa6). There was also disagreement with the statement that they became friends outside the internet (pa4). The comparison of students versus lecturers revealed significant differences for the statements pa1 ($t = -3.84$; $p < .001$), pa2 ($t = -2.06$; $p = .042$), and pa5 ($t = 2.43$; $p = .019$), but only in case of pa2 the pattern of agreement was different: While lecturers assumed that their students accepted their request because of sympathy, students were indifferent about this assumption. Table 3 shows the statistical values for the items on the acceptance of the own SL-contact request.

Table 3. Acceptance of the own SL-contact request.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
pa1 - Normal	146	4.08 (1.07)	122	3.98 (1.11)	24	4.58 (0.58)
pa2 - Sympathy (assumed)	135	3.47 (1.25)	112	3.38 (1.25)	23	3.96 (1.19)
pa3 - Pleased	142	3.56 (1.08)	119	3.56 (1.09)	23	3.57 (1.04)
pa4 - Afterwards friendship	135	2.10 (1.18)	113	2.12 (1.17)	22	2.00 (1.23)
pa5 - Surprised	141	1.69 (1.02)	118	1.75 (1.07)	23	1.35 (0.65)
pa6 - Inhibitions to reject (assumed)	138	1.75 (1.09)	115	1.71 (1.11)	23	1.91 (0.95)

✦ *Perception of the denial of the own SL-contact request*

Asked how it was when the own SL-contact request was declined, there was agreement with the statements that they understood if the other one did not want such contacts (pd2) and they assumed the other one wanted to keep distance (pd6). The participants disagreed with the statements that the denial was like a slap in the face (pd1), that they thought it was arrogant (pd3), and that they assumed the other one did not like them (pd5). The comparison of students versus lecturers was not reasonable because of the low numbers (only 1 lecturer). Table 4 shows the statistical values for the items on the perception of the denial of the own SL-contact request.

Table 4. Denial of the own SL-contact request.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
pd1 - Slap in the face	13	1.23 (0.83)	12	1.25 (0.87)	1	1.00 (-)
pd2 - Understanding	12	4.58 (0.67)	11	4.55 (0.69)	1	5.00 (-)
pd3 - Arrogant	13	1.46 (0.97)	12	1.50 (1.00)	1	1.00 (-)
pd4 - Inappropriate (assumed)	12	3.33 (1.30)	11	3.18 (1.25)	1	5.00 (-)
pd5 - No sympathy (assumed)	13	1.77 (1.54)	12	1.83 (1.59)	1	1.00 (-)
pd6 - Keep distance (assumed)	12	4.08 (1.31)	11	4.00 (1.34)	1	5.00 (-)
pd7 - Afraid of manipulation (assumed)	12	2.50 (1.31)	11	2.55 (1.37)	1	2.00 (-)

3.1.2 Other's Initiative

Altogether, 265 persons reported that they have received SL-contact requests: 207 accepted, 13 declined, and 45 partly accepted and partly declined the requests. (In addition, 123 persons indicated that they never have received a SL-contact request, and 38 persons did not remember.)

✦ *Perception of the other's SL-contact request*

Asked for their perception of the other's SL-contact request, the participants agreed that they were pleased when receiving it (pr11) and they thought it was okay (pr2). There was disagreement that they were only added if academic information was provided on Facebook (pr13) or that they were only

added after the course was finished (pr14). Additionally, the participants did not assume that the SL-contact request expressed the wish for friendship (pr9) or was a friendship offer (pr10). They also did not assume the other one feared that they could reject the request (pr6). The comparison of students versus lecturers showed significant differences for the statements pr1 ($t = 2.72$; $p = .007$), pr3 ($t = -3.25$; $p = .001$), pr6 ($t = -2.78$; $p = .006$), pr7 ($t = -3.47$; $p = .001$), pr10 ($t = 2.15$; $p = .033$), pr11 ($t = 3.87$; $p < .001$), and pr13 ($t = 2.59$; $p = .010$). However, only in case of pr7 and pr11 this changed the pattern of agreement: lecturers assumed that they were added because their students liked them, but students were indifferent about this statement (pr7). Students reported they were pleased if they liked the lecturer, but lecturers were indifferent (pr11). Table 5 shows the statistical values for the items on receiving a SL-contact request.

Table 5. Perception of the other's SL-contact request.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
pr1 - Spontaneous	203	2.89 (1.29)	127	3.08 (1.26)	76	2.58 (1.27)
pr2 - Okay	206	3.58 (1.15)	128	3.67 (1.12)	78	3.42 (1.18)
pr3 - Interest (assumed)	203	2.97 (1.22)	129	2.76 (1.23)	74	3.32 (1.12)
pr4 - Reduce distance (assumed)	203	3.10 (1.20)	127	3.11 (1.22)	76	3.08 (1.19)
pr5 - Rarely & Inhibitions (assumed)	184	3.35 (1.33)	112	3.49 (1.39)	72	3.13 (1.22)
pr6 - Fear of rejection (assumed)	186	1.92 (1.12)	120	1.76 (1.08)	66	2.23 (1.13)
pr7 - Sympathy (assumed)	199	3.27 (1.27)	126	3.04 (1.32)	73	3.67 (1.08)
pr8 - Appreciation (assumed)	200	3.08 (1.26)	126	3.06 (1.29)	74	3.11 (1.21)
pr9 - Wish for friendship (assumed)	197	1.96 (1.12)	124	1.92 (1.16)	73	2.03 (1.07)
pr10 - Friendship offer (assumed)	205	2.07 (1.19)	129	2.21 (1.23)	76	1.84 (1.10)
pr11 - Pleased	206	3.76 (1.12)	131	3.99 (1.03)	75	3.36 (1.18)
pr12 - Existing friendship	197	2.94 (1.54)	122	3.10 (1.54)	75	2.69 (1.51)
pr13 - Academic information	191	1.95 (1.22)	119	2.12 (1.31)	72	1.68 (1.00)
pr14 - Course finished	170	2.25 (1.42)	98	2.27 (1.50)	72	2.22 (1.30)

★ Background of accepting the SL-contact request

The analysis of the statements on the background of accepting the SL-contact request showed agreement that sympathy was the reason for the acceptance (a2) and that the acceptance was totally normal (a1). The participants disagreed that they assumed the other was surprised (a5). Additionally, they had no inhibitions to reject the SL-contact request (a6). Also, the participants disagreed that they developed friendship outside the internet afterwards (a4). The comparison of students versus lecturers showed significant differences for the statement a6 ($t = 4.48$; $p < .001$), but this did not change the pattern of disagreement to this statement. Table 6 shows the statistical values for the items on the acceptance of the other's SL-contact request.

Table 6. Acceptance of the other's SL-contact request.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
a1 - Normal	197	3.52 (1.27)	129	3.57 (1.24)	68	3.43 (1.33)
a2 - Sympathy	194	3.96 (1.08)	127	4.03 (1.09)	67	3.84 (1.07)
a3 - Pleased (assumed)	169	3.09 (1.11)	110	2.99 (1.18)	59	3.27 (0.94)
a4 - Afterwards friendship	184	2.11 (1.21)	119	2.16 (1.22)	65	2.02 (1.21)
a5 - Surprised (assumed)	179	1.51 (0.86)	115	1.44 (0.85)	64	1.63 (0.86)
a6 - Inhibitions to reject	192	2.02 (1.40)	125	2.29 (1.55)	67	1.51 (0.86)

✦ *Background of the denial of the SL-contact request*

In relation to the following results on the denial of SL-contact request, please note that (like already reported) SL-contact requests were mainly accepted, only a very small minority reported about the rejection of SL-contact requests. Thus, the number of valid cases for the accordingly items was very low and thus, the results reported below have to be handled with care.

Asked for the background of the denial of the SL-contact request the participants agreed that they wanted to keep distance (d6), they found such contacts inappropriate (d4), and they assumed the other will understand that they did not want to have such contacts (d2). The participants disagreed that they thought it was a slap in the face for the other one (d1) or that the other thought they were arrogant (d3). Additionally, they did not decline the request because they were afraid of manipulation (d7) or because they did not like the other one (d5). The comparison of students versus lecturers showed no significant differences for the statements. Table 7 shows the statistical values for the items on the denial of the other's SL-contact request.

Table 7. Denial of the other's SL-contact request.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
d1 - Slap in the face (assumed)	39	1.92 (1.04)	17	2.12 (1.17)	22	1.77 (0.92)
d2 - Understanding (assumed)	42	3.62 (1.15)	19	3.47 (1.35)	23	3.74 (0.96)
d3 - Arrogant (assumed)	38	2.11 (1.11)	18	2.06 (1.26)	20	2.15 (0.99)
d4 - Inappropriate	43	3.60 (1.24)	18	3.22 (1.40)	25	3.88 (1.05)
d5 - No sympathy	41	2.10 (1.14)	16	2.38 (1.26)	25	1.92 (1.04)
d6 - Keep distance	43	3.77 (1.17)	17	3.59 (1.06)	26	3.88 (1.24)
d7 - Afraid of manipulation	40	2.08 (1.27)	15	2.07 (1.39)	25	2.08 (1.22)

3.2 Results on RQ2 – Perception of the Status Quo

3.2.1 Participants with SL-Contacts

The analysis of the items on the perception of own existing SL-contacts showed that participants with SL-contacts agreed only with two statements: that they had an existing friendship outside the internet and thus, the other one was also among their Facebook-contacts (w14) and that it did not matter if there were also SL-contacts among their Facebook-contacts (w2). There was disagreement with most of the other items, namely that they hoped for better grading / evaluation due to the SL-contact (w18), that they wanted to make a good impression (w17), that others envied them for having SL-contacts (w8), that they wanted to quit but did not dare to delete the SL-contact (w6), that they were (afterwards) embarrassed (w5), that they sometimes felt like monitored (w11), that they had their SL-contacts in a separate list/group (w21), that they feared they possibly could reveal something embarrassing (w12), that it would be too complicated to divide private and university issues (w10), that they thought it was cool to have SL-contacts (w9), that academic information on Facebook was the decisive reason for SL-contacts (w16), and that they thought SL-contacts make a good impression (w7). The comparison of students versus lecturers showed significant differences for the items w2 ($t = 2.32$; $p = .022$), w3 ($t = 2.19$; $p = .029$), w4 ($t = 2.68$; $p = .008$), w9 ($t = 2.99$; $p = .003$), w16 ($t = 2.46$; $p = .015$), w20 ($t = -2.09$; $p = .038$), and w21 ($t = -2.27$; $p = .025$). But only in case of w2 there was a different pattern of agreement: Only students agreed on the statement that it did not matter to have SL-contacts. Lecturers were indifferent about this statement. Table 8 shows the statistical values for the items on the status quo of having SL-contacts.

Table 8. Perception of the status quo of having SL-contacts.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
w1 - Normal	309	3.21 (1.36)	226	3.23 (1.35)	83	3.16 (1.40)
w2 - Doesn't matter	303	3.59 (1.32)	222	3.71 (1.25)	81	3.28 (1.46)
w3 - Interest	309	3.06 (1.33)	226	3.15 (1.33)	83	2.78 (1.30)
w4 - Appropriate	300	2.63 (1.14)	217	2.74 (1.13)	83	2.35 (1.14)
w5 - Embarrassing	300	1.57 (1.00)	221	1.58 (1.01)	79	1.56 (0.97)
w6 - Inhibitions to delete	300	1.48 (1.04)	221	1.51 (1.08)	79	1.39 (0.91)
w7 - Good impression	286	2.47 (1.14)	207	2.54 (1.20)	79	2.28 (0.92)
w8 - Envy	294	1.45 (0.92)	221	1.48 (0.95)	73	1.36 (0.82)
w9 - Cool	300	2.15 (1.21)	220	2.26 (1.26)	80	1.84 (1.02)
w10 - Less complicated / open privacy	293	2.01 (1.26)	214	2.11 (1.29)	79	1.73 (1.12)
w11 - Feel monitored	299	1.67 (1.12)	221	1.63 (1.12)	78	1.78 (1.12)
w12 - Fear of embarrassing	303	1.99 (1.34)	224	1.97 (1.36)	79	2.05 (1.30)
w13 - Sympathy	276	2.78 (1.33)	203	2.87 (1.29)	73	2.53 (1.40)
w14 - Existing friendship	266	3.81 (1.32)	195	3.84 (1.33)	71	3.75 (1.32)
w15 - Similar age	271	2.91 (1.46)	200	2.96 (1.51)	71	2.79 (1.30)
w16 - Academic information	274	2.28 (1.48)	204	2.40 (1.51)	70	1.93 (1.34)
w17 - Good impression	279	1.42 (0.88)	207	1.45 (0.94)	72	1.32 (0.67)
w18 - Evaluation/gradings	280	1.25 (0.77)	208	1.26 (0.82)	72	1.21 (0.60)
w19 - Course finished	273	2.80 (1.67)	202	2.76 (1.71)	71	2.92 (1.57)
w20 - Address informally	271	3.07 (1.61)	202	2.96 (1.58)	69	3.42 (1.66)
w21 - Separate lists	276	1.84 (1.43)	205	1.71 (1.34)	71	2.20 (1.62)

3.2.2 Participants without SL-Contacts

Asked how they perceive the status quo of having no SL-contacts, the participants without SL-contacts agreed on the statements that they never thought about to add a SL-contact (n2), that they had no existing friendships with their students/lecturers outside the internet and therefore had also no SL-contacts (n19), that they thought the other one did not want SL-contacts (n4), that they felt it was somehow inappropriate (n6), and that they wanted to keep distance to their students/lecturers (n8). There was disagreement with the statements that they envied others for SL-contacts (n12), that they feared their SL-contact request could be rejected (n14), that they did not really like one of their students / lecturers (n18), that it would not be cool to have SL-contacts (n13), that they preferred to wait until the course was finished (n24), that the age difference was too large (n20), and that they felt it would be embarrassing to have SL-contacts (n7). The comparison of students versus lecturers showed significant differences for the statements n1 ($t = -2.75$; $p = .007$), n3 ($t = 6.30$; $p < .001$), n4 ($t = 4.32$; $p < .001$), n6 ($t = -3.52$; $p = .001$), n7 ($t = -3.33$; $p = .001$), n8 ($t = -5.45$; $p < .001$), n9 ($t = -4.04$; $p < .001$), n10 ($t = 6.71$; $p < .001$), n11 ($t = -2.21$; $p = .027$), n13 ($t = -3.07$; $p = .003$), n14 ($t = 3.83$; $p < .001$), n15 ($t = -4.49$; $p < .001$), n16 ($t = -2.30$; $p = .022$), n18 ($t = 4.03$; $p < .001$), n19 ($t = 2.99$; $p = .003$), and n21 ($t = -7.84$; $p < .001$). However, only in case of n1, n4, n15, and n21 the pattern of agreement changed: Only lecturers found SL-contacts not normal, students were indifferent (n1). Students assumed that their lecturers did not want SL-contacts, but lecturers were indifferent about this statement (n4). Lecturers agreed that they wanted strictly private Facebook-accounts, but students were indifferent about this issue (n15). Lecturers agreed that they had no SL-contacts because they did not offer academic information on Facebook, whereas students were indifferent about this issue (n21). Table 9 shows the statistical values for the items on the status quo of not having SL-contacts.

Table 9. Perception of the status quo of having no SL-contacts.

Items	All		Students		Lecturers	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
n1 - Not normal	1923	3.49 (1.44)	1811	3.47 (1.45)	112	3.83 (1.34)
n2 - Never thought	1969	4.32 (1.17)	1855	4.32 (1.17)	114	4.32 (1.15)
n3 - Wouldn't matter	1953	2.90 (1.44)	1842	2.95 (1.44)	111	2.15 (1.28)
n4 - Refusial (assumed)	1906	3.94 (1.07)	1800	3.97 (1.05)	106	3.46 (1.19)
n5 - No interest	1942	3.41 (1.25)	1831	3.41 (1.25)	111	3.41 (1.22)
n6 - Inappropriate	1969	3.83 (1.27)	1854	3.81 (1.28)	115	4.17 (1.03)
n7 - Embarrassing	1920	2.38 (1.28)	1809	2.35 (1.27)	111	2.77 (1.25)
n8 - Keep distance	1961	3.56 (1.16)	1847	3.53 (1.16)	114	4.04 (0.95)
n9 - Inhibitions (assumed)	1650	2.95 (1.25)	1551	2.92 (1.25)	99	3.44 (1.11)
n10 - Inhibitions	1825	2.69 (1.44)	1721	2.74 (1.44)	104	1.91 (1.20)
n11 - Bad impression	1900	3.06 (1.25)	1789	3.04 (1.26)	111	3.32 (1.19)
n12 - Envy	1925	1.37 (0.85)	1810	1.38 (0.86)	115	1.27 (0.81)
n13 - Not cool	1845	1.92 (1.16)	1742	1.89 (1.15)	103	2.31 (1.35)
n14 - Fear of rejection	1852	1.47 (0.94)	1741	1.48 (0.95)	111	1.23 (0.65)
n15 - Strict privacy	1936	2.91 (1.41)	1822	2.88 (1.40)	114	3.53 (1.43)
n16 - Feel monitored	1936	2.81 (1.43)	1825	2.79 (1.43)	111	3.11 (1.44)
n17 - Embarrassing	1902	3.17 (1.46)	1795	3.16 (1.46)	107	3.32 (1.39)
n18 - No sympathy	1830	1.82 (1.00)	1724	1.84 (1.01)	106	1.49 (0.85)
n19 - No existing friendship	1816	4.04 (1.30)	1713	4.06 (1.29)	103	3.62 (1.46)
n20 - Age different	1803	2.09 (1.10)	1701	2.08 (1.09)	102	2.25 (1.17)
n21 - No academic information	1308	2.93 (1.44)	1202	2.84 (1.41)	106	3.90 (1.32)
n22 - Avoid flattery	1776	3.07 (1.38)	1671	3.08 (1.38)	105	2.95 (1.43)
n23 - Dependent relationship	1738	2.97 (1.37)	1636	2.96 (1.37)	102	3.13 (1.42)
n24 - Course not finished	1691	1.92 (1.17)	1588	1.90 (1.17)	103	2.10 (1.28)

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, within our sample SL-contacts were rather seldom. The results of the participants with SL-contacts indicated that the own SL-contacts were seen as a rather normal. SL-contacts were neither just work-related connections nor very close personal contacts. Reasons for adding SL-contacts were sympathy and the assumption that it was okay for the other one. Sending a SL-contact request was neither just a try nor a wish for friendship nor the attempt to reduce personal distance. Remarkably, adding the own students or lecturers, respectively, was also not connected with academic information on Facebook. The answers on the acceptance and the denial of a SL-contact request strengthened the interpretation that SL-contacts were not seen as something special. In case of acceptance of the own request, the participants were pleased, but not surprised. Similarly, when receiving a SL-contact request the participants were pleased and thought that it was okay. Analogous to the reasons for sending a request, the acceptance of a request was based on sympathy and the assumption that acceptance was the normal reaction. SL-contact requests were mainly accepted, only a very small minority reported about the rejection of SL-contact requests. The (seldom) denial of a SL-contact request was done in order to keep distance or because the SL-contact was seen as inappropriate. Additionally, it was assumed that the other one would understand the denial. Indeed, participants who reported about a rejection agreed that they could understand if the other one preferred to keep distance. Thus, the background of sending and receiving SL-contact request was very well in line with each other, i.e., both sides shared a common ground of understanding how to handle the situation.

Asked for the status quo, the participants with SL-contacts mainly reported that they had an existing friendship outside the internet or that it did not matter if they had SL-contacts among their other Facebook contacts. Remarkably, there was disagreement with most of the other statements including

academic information on Facebook as the reason for SL-contacts. Thus, also the description of the status quo indicated that the own SL-contacts were estimated as rather normal. The answers of the participants without SL-contacts were partly mixed. On the one hand, there was agreement that they simply had never thought of having SL-contacts and since they had no existing friendship outside the internet there was no reason for having SL-contacts. They disagreed that a lack of sympathy was the reason for not having SL-contacts or that they feared an SL-contact could be somehow embarrassing. However, on the other hand, participants without SL-contacts also felt that SL-contacts were somehow inappropriate; thereby two explanations are possible: Either, the feeling of inappropriateness prevented SL-contacts, or the feeling of inappropriateness was a kind of consequence of having no SL-contacts (i.e., SL-contacts were something unknown and thus, seemed somehow strange).

Overall our findings indicate that students as well as lecturers estimate their own existing SL-contacts as rather positive while people without SL-contacts have neutral view. Thereby, our findings are well in line with prior findings on the students' usage of Facebook for mainly private issues. In this sense, SL-contacts are just normal Facebook-contacts with a person that is – among other things – a (former) student or lecturer. Our study provided first insights in the development and quality of SL-contact. However, there are some limitations of our data: First of all, our sample was probably biased by interest in Facebook, i.e., mainly those people participated who were curious or emotionally involved in the topic. Additionally, our data were based on a German sample, and thus, it would be interesting to investigate how SL-contacts are estimated in other countries and cultures. Besides, a changing learning culture might influence the perception of contacts between students and lecturers in the future. Especially the Open Science movement and the democratization of academic hierarchies could result in a stronger interconnectedness between lecturers and students.

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