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# Facebook: one Faculty's attempt to enhance student engagement

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- Questions/issues

# Overview

- Facebook began in 2004; grown to have 1.5 billion users worldwide, over 30 million in the UK
- Central OU approach does *not* encourage Faculties to create separate profiles in social media – more a University-level marketing tool
- Social Sciences set about using Facebook to explore educational potential through enhancing the academic community

# Literature 1

- Extensive academic literature which present overviews of research into why people use Facebook
- The most important is sustaining friendship networks, particularly when such networks are geographically dispersed.
- However: research into pedagogy of Facebook at a relatively early stage – especially in supported distance learning Universities

# Literature 2

- Little success in integrating social media into a formal pattern of learning: “While more than 70% of the students reported having a social networking account, they also indicated that they rarely used social media for educational purposes”
- While all academics use social media for personal and professional (research and networking) purposes there was a reluctance to use it in a formal learning environment
- Concerns: privacy; not a tool of formal learning; time constraints

# Social Science, Rationale for Facebook

- Facebook is not used as a *formal* part of teaching
- Facebook is used to engage with students and build a broader sense of academic community with academics and other students
- Help address isolation of some distance learning students by creating a sense of 'academic community'

# Social Science, Features

- Links to/from other Faculty and University digital assets (for example OpenLearn and FutureLearn MOOC 'live chats')
- Links to photos and videos (e.g. of an academic teaching team meeting in progress, a 'sneak peak' video of a forthcoming module)
- Weekly study skills and 'Friday Thinker' posts

# Examples of postings

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01-Jun-15 Promo of June PodMag (this provides description of life as OU student)

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02-Jun-15 How do you motivate yourself to get through your studies/work? Share your tips with us.

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03-Jun-15 Promo of OU Student Association societies

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07-Jun-15 Promo of Thinking Allowed (BBC radio programme)

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# Examples of Friday thinkers

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04-Jun-15      Introduction to Jef Huysmans - FT Thinker

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05-Jun-15      FT - Jef Huysmans - *Is there such a thing as too much security?*

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11-Jun-15      Introduction to Steve Tombs - FT Thinker

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12-Jun-15      FT - Steve Tombs - *How corrupt is Britain?*

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18-Jun-15      Introduction to Jonquil Lowe - FT Thinker

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19-Jun-15      FT - Jonquil Lowe - *Do consumers need advice when making financial decisions and should they have to pay for it?*

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# Social Sciences on Facebook

Page Activity 32 Insights Settings Build Audience Help

**The Open University - Social Sciences**  
Education

Create Call-to-Action Liked Share

THIS WEEK

- 81 Page Likes
- 12,888 Post Reach
- UNREAD
- 32 Notifications

Recent

- 2015
- 2014
- 2013

Timeline About Photos Reviews More



## The Open University - Social Sciences

Posted by Sarah Frain [?] - February 27 at 7:00am

Friday Thinker question: Can social scientists explain why some young European Muslims are attracted to Islamist political ideology and violence?

9,532 people reached

Boosted

Like - Comment - Share - 46 113 13

Ashish Kumar Verma, Thai Bryde Bryan Rhodes, Donna Stewart and 43 others like this.

13 shares

View previous comments



**Nicola Rae** Teenagers are known to be impressionable and tend to seek a group to belong. Some are already vulnerable due to life situations they have witnessed or experienced. I believe these individuals are seeking somewhere to belong and are be given promises which will they eyes be the main reason for going and the extremism is secondary and not given much thought

Like - Reply - 5 - February 27 at 7:48am



**Ryszard Pawliczek** Identity crisis, even being born in Europe they will never be fully accepted . That creates frustration and anger which is perfect ground for violence and radical ideas.

Like - Reply - 6 - February 27 at 7:52am

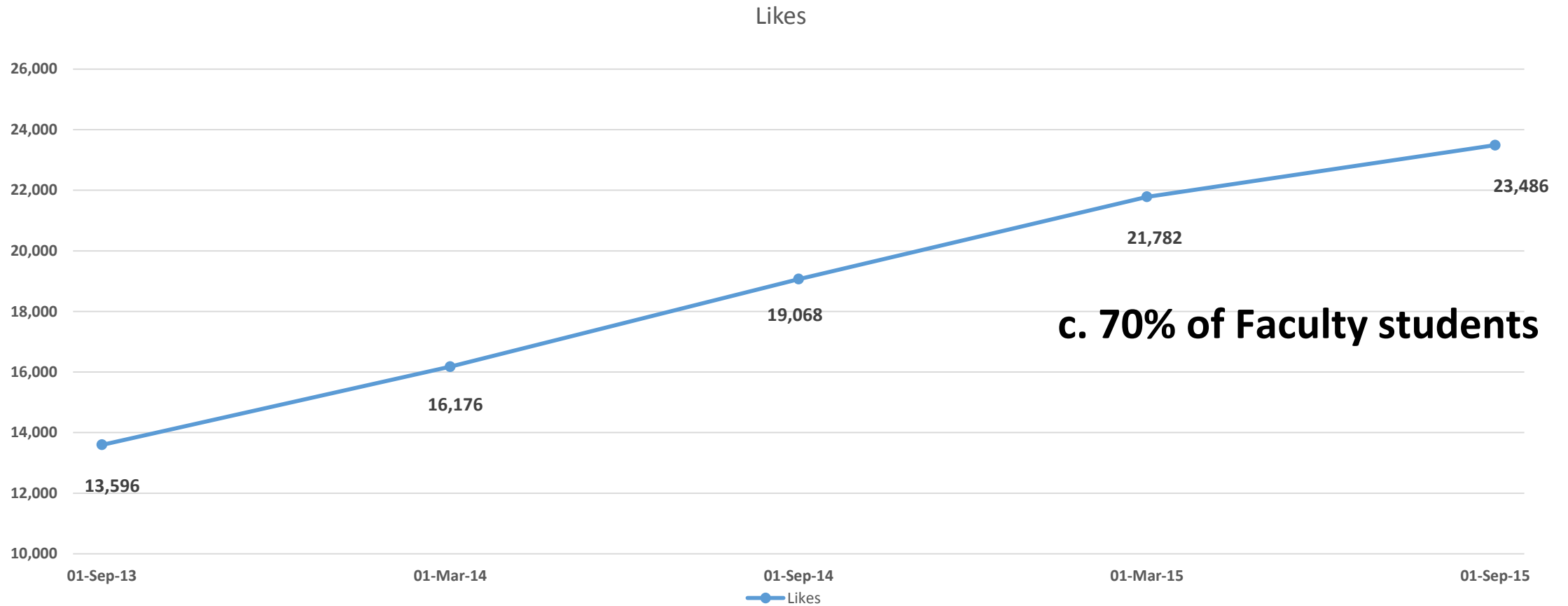
Question posed by Prof Marie Gillespie, Dept. of Sociology

9,532 people reached

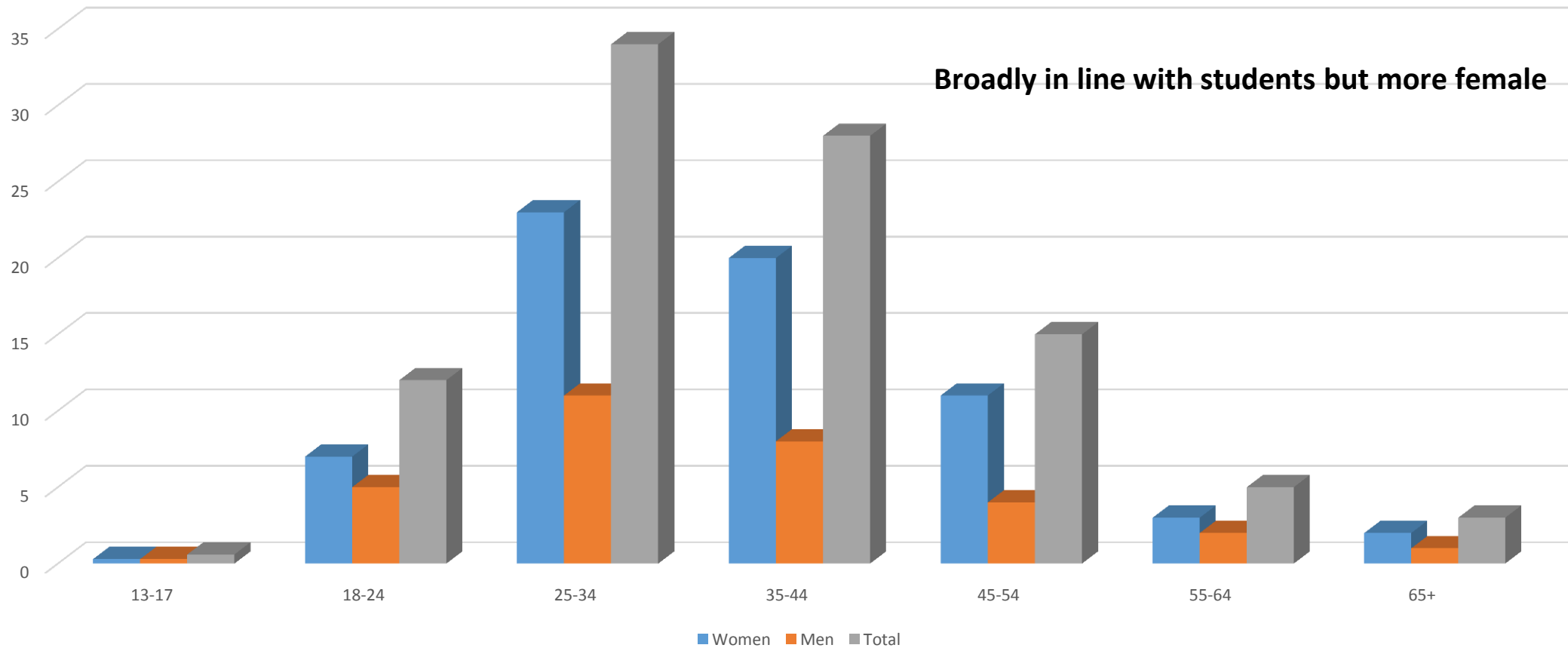
777 click throughs

113 comments posted

# Social Science Facebook page: Likes 2013-2015



# Likes by Gender & Age, Sept 2015



# Summary

- Social Sciences set out to use Facebook to help to build an academic community with its distance learning students
- Evidence indicates that a large number of students have engaged with the Facebook page, with many hundreds participating in discussions and others simply reading and following posts.
- The initiative also helped expose a number of Faculty staff to the potential for using Facebook for teaching and learning.

# Questions

- Opportunity cost of the time students spent on Facebook - might this otherwise have been used for studying OU module materials?
- Should we develop the relatively shallow (from a pedagogic perspective) use of Facebook as a community-building tool to make it part of formal learning?
- What staff development challenges are there to expanding Facebook use so that, for example, the Open University's many hundreds of part time Associate Lecturers might use it?

# Issues

- Ethics of OU associating itself with a highly commercial organisation like Facebook, where the postings feed the company product (i.e. its database)
- Practical considerations – Facebook could change its business model, privacy settings etc. at any time
- But perhaps Universities should engage with students wherever they are, as Plato wrote in *The Republic* “Educators should devise the simplest and most effective methods of turning minds around”