Strengthening the academic usage of social media: An exploratory study

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Abstract Technology strengthens learning and dominates over the conventional methods in too many aspects. Technologies are advancing learning procedure by their multiple formats, variety of resources, numerous delivery channels and not restricted to time space and place. Social media is a new form of communication that transformed the entire landscape of information access and dissemination online. This platform consists of a range of communication channels, considerably popular among students and assists them in various types of communication and collaborative learning. However, the platform of social media can also be considered as a source of distractions and divert student's attention from learning and academic achievements. The principal objective of the current study is to understand the recent trends of social media use, the phenomenon of distractions and factors out convincing students for the academic use of social media. Interviews administered to enquire the phenomenon and analyzed with the help of ATLAS-Ti-7 and MS Excel. It is concluded from the results that individual psychological characteristics, social influences, information quality and system usefulness are the leading factors. Furthermore, the survey established the importance of this platform for academic purposes and perception concerning the phenomenon of distraction. In addition, future research directions and study limitations are discussed.

1. Introduction

Technologies enhance learning, increases learning demand and offer flexible delivery with respect to time, space and place (Westera, 2012). Technology has advantages over the traditional intermediaries in terms of display such as images; color graphics, audio, videos and transferring of information in short period of time (Ziqing and Jinping, 2013). The history of technologies in education is traced back to the inventions of Thomas Alva Edison recording devices and reached to the present era of interaction or two-way communications with

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the invention of computer and the Internet (Westera, 2012). Social media is a new form of communication and consists of a variety of commutation tolls such as, blogs, collaborative projects, social networking sites, content communities and virtual world (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). These sites contribute by providing unlimited opportunities to interact, socialize and share with each other (Correa, Bachmann, & Hinsley, 2013 and Özgüven and Mucan, 2013). Social media has become an extremely important means of communication of the present age (Al-rahimi et al., 2013) and connect people with similar interest of sharing activities (boyd and Ellison, 2008).

According to Global Digital Statistics (2014), there are 2.95 billion (41% of total population) people who are active Internet users with 2.03 billion penetrations of active social media users, whereas 1.56 billion of them access these social applications through their mobile devices (We are social, 2014). Social media applications are commonly used by millions of people across the world for different reasons on the regular basis (Al-rahmi et al., 2014). This rapid growth in acceptance of social media applications in a short period of time is due to its increasingly widespread operation by students (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010). This increase in the use of these applications is because of its convenience, flexibility and functionalities (Al-rahimi et al., 2013). These tools are highly beneficial for students of higher education and modernizing the process of student learning, interaction, collaboration and sharing (Chai-lee, 2013 and Al-rahmi et al., 2014). However, on the other hand, these applications are also a source of distraction and divert students' attention from their learning (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010; Purcell et al., 2013; Junco and Cotten, 2012). Nevertheless, social media has reduced the geographical barriers, and we are no longer limited geographically. Today everyone can interact, comment, debate and collaboratively create knowledge, no matter where they are. The application assists students in too many aspects and needs to understand their use behavior (Boyd and Ellison, 2008), because, social media facilitates learner integration and satisfaction (Andersen, 2013).

Learning takes place by interacting with others, exchanging ideas and critiques. Policy makers and educators are required to develop strategies and design applications to motivate students in adaption of social media for learning (Helou et al., 2012 and Santoso et al., 2014) by integrating with their learning activities (Baran, 2013 and Chai-lee, 2013). Human beings, in general, and students, in particular, are a very complex phenomenon, and their motivational problems are usually manifested in their behavior, which needs careful and systematic observation (McKerlich et al., 2013) Because inquiring their online behavior is important to enhance their learning experiences (Jin et al., 2013) and particularly to their information sharing (Sohn, 2014; Chang and Hsiao, 2014; Tinto, 2013). In Malaysian perspective, these emerging technologies are negatively affecting students' reading behavior and learning performances (Inderjit, 2014 and Hamat et al., 2012) and very rarely examined, which may cause serious problems and threats to the future sustainable development of young higher education (Masrom and Usat, 2013). The purpose of the current investigation is to explore those factors that can help to understand the academic use of social media among students, reduce the phenomenon of learning distraction and enhance their online engagement.

2. Literature review

Creativeness, innovativeness, collaboration and competitiveness are highly essential for successes in the global markets of today. People and societies constantly require information for improvement of their knowledge. Technology enhances learning, increases learning demand, increases customization and facilitates flexible delivery with respect to the time, pace and place (Westera, 2012). Thomas Alva Edison was the first to create the technology for recording and displaying moving images by the end of the 19th century. Edison claimed that the technology would bring revolution in education by bringing new ideas for learning and contents. According to Cuban (1986) before the advent of moving images, radio was used in educational deliveries during 1910 and Reiser (1987) instructional television from 1950 to support instruction and learning as cited by (Westera, 2012). During 1960, audio compact cassettes became available as a portable recording device and were used to provide guidance along with written material. Lasser (2005) and Westera (2012) are further describing that the arrival of video cassettes as a next revolution in learning and education. These resources were more flexible and students could use it any time. Computer was commercialized in 1980. In contrast to audio & video technologies, computer was found more interactive. According to Papert (1982) interaction with computer is an ideal environment for knowledge production, while Shank and Cleary (1995) mentioned that computers make available all the things essential for learning with creative excitement, eagerness, curiosity, exploration, natural learning, and fun as cited by (Westera, 2012). According to Lai & Kritsonis (2006), computer has positive effect on student learning and other achievements, employing computer technology in learning can be convenient to generate independent and collaborative learning environment. While Gulekand Demirtas (2005) and Lowther (2007) using computer technologies can improve students' learning as compared to traditional methods especially in subjects such as, Mathematics, geometry, languages, writing and overall grade point averages and its immediate feedback leads to reduced learning time as cited by (Saba, 2009).

The advent of the internet during 1990s marks an essential change in the way society functions. The wide-ranging nature of the internet gives new ideas of information access, information services and social connectivity, enlarged global economy and wider exchange of cultures. Internet represents the first technological invention that allows education providers to bring changes at an institutional and organizational level. The digital divide among the young and adults shows that the new generation has a more positive attitude toward new technologies (Westera, 2012). Internet has rapidly entered the life of the people in the 20th century. It is a fast means of communication to get people closer to each other, within a short time while having the ability to enhance their knowledge. Educational literature which is freely accessible such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, references, databases etc play an important role in distant learning, in collaborative projects with students from other schools, universities, countries and also enables discussion of different problems with them. Internet in the sphere of education is really unique and was invented especially for education (UNESCO, 2003). Internet turned to a symbol of change as it offered unlimited choices to access