THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNSs) have created a new social dimension where individuals can increase their social awareness by keeping in touch with old friends, making new friends, dispensing new data or products and gathering information in other aspects of everyday life. This helps individuals become more knowledgeable, which is very beneficial for students. This research attempts to obtain students’ perceptions on how their use of social networking sites influences their academic performance. We conducted a preliminary survey of a group of Malaysian university student to gather initial findings on their use of social networking sites and its influence on their academic performance. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the data. This study found that the majority of respondents agreed that social networking sites have a positive impact on their academic performance.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites, Academic Performance, Malaysia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet is more than just a means of seeking information. People have discovered that the Internet can be used to connect with other people for business or commercial purpose, to make new friends, or to reawaken old friends and long lost relatives. The emergence of social networking sites
(SNSs) simplifies the process because they do not require advanced internet knowledge or experience and are made up of a wide array of different formats and topics. This means that anyone can connect through SNSs. With such extensive acceptance, it is no surprise that SNSs have impacted the way people live and socialize.

SNSs are also being used by teachers and students as a communication tool, especially in the West. It is a bi-directional process as students are using these mediums to share comments with their teachers. This study attempts to answer the questions: what are the reasons students engage in the use of SNSs? And how does the use of SNSs impact on students’ academic performance?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

SNSs have been defined as web based services that, within a bounded system, enable individuals to construct a semi-profile and articulate a list of other users with whom they share connections and views. Another given definition of SNSs is “an online community of Internet users who want to communicate with other users about areas of mutual interest.” The term “networking” emphasizes relationship initiation between strangers, which is one of the main activities of SNSs users. Examples of SNSs include: Twitter, Friendster, MySpace (popular with the music/party community), Facebook (popular with the college community), Orkut and many others.

The majority of SNSs users are young people, who have been called ‘Digital Natives.’ The most common users are students in higher education. They often use SNSs to stay in touch with their friends or bolster existing connections rather than developing new connections. This usage exposed the potential for SNSs to be a medium for online learning that would be more valuable than conventional e-learning platform if the activities of e-learning could be closely integrated into the features of SNSs.

Academic performance is defined as “...how students deal with their studies and how they cope with or accomplish different tasks given to them by their teachers.” Baldwin et al. indicated that friendship networks often necessitate access to information and knowledge directly and indirectly, and effect of friendship networks on student academic performance has been confirmed. A student’s involvement in activities like making friends on SNSs should be seen as students having access to relevant information that can be channeled towards improving the students’ academic performance. This depends on the ability and willingness of the concerned individual to be able to harness that opportunity and to cope with academic related stress.
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A set of preliminary questionnaires consisting of 31 questions were randomly distributed to 30 undergraduate and postgraduate students of the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. The questionnaires were distributed randomly in the computer library during academic hours. This university was chosen because of its strategic importance as a world-class research university with a wide range of specialized courses and subjects at the professional diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate levels; a large number of students; and a large international student population with a diverse range of cultures and religions which could reflect the diversity of SNSs users. However, this study is only preliminary, meant to test the instrument and also to gather initial findings. The actual set of questionnaires will be distributed to other institutes of higher learning in Malaysia. The questionnaire was divided into two broad sections (A and B) that are aimed at answering the two research questions: What are the reasons students engage in the use of SNSs? And how does the use of SNSs impact students’ academic performance? Questions in the survey were adapted from the literature review and previous surveys\textsuperscript{6, 7, 9}. The questions also elicited perceptual responses and certain specific responses, which can be useful to add specificity to the findings. After the data were collected, SPSS 16 Software was use for the analysis.

![Figure 1. Students’ use of SNSs](image)

4. FINDINGS

The questionnaire starts with demographic questions, finding age, gender, academic level and nationality. The responses showed that 37% of those who participated are male while 63% are female. 43% of them are undergraduate respondents and 57% are postgraduate respondents. Age
group of those who participated in the survey are from 16-21 years old (43%), 22-27 old (27%), 28 years old and above (30%).

Figure 1 shows the reasons students use SNSs. The majority of the respondents use SNSs for making friends (21%) and chatting (21%). Respondents also use SNSs for receiving and sending messages (17%). 8% use SNSs for playing games and 7% use SNSs to share files. 26% of the respondents indicated that they use SNSs for academic purposes like communicating with their supervisors and lecturers (8%), conducting academic related discussions (9%), and communicating with friends for academic interests (9%), which is less than the time they spend on other activities unrelated to academics.

Tables 2 and 3 show the analysis on the average response to questions on the negative and positive impact of SNSs to student’s academic performance on a 5-point scale.

**Table 2.** Negative impacts of SNSs on student’s academic performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>These networking sites influence my academic performance negatively, because they distract me from my studies.</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Using SNSs require spending money and are wastage of time and by this way it will affect my academic life.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Addiction to SNSs is problematic issue that affects my academic life.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find it hard concentrating on study knowing that I can play online games and visit these sites just by logging into them.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I compare my grades before I become engaged into these SNSs and after I became involved. I see a drop in my academic performance.</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>SNSs are personal/social-can’t be used for education.</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, responses on the negative impacts of SNSs to student academic performance have lower means, which range from 2.40 to 3.00. Many feel there are no significant differences in their grades before and after their involvement with SNSs. They also believe that SNSs are for personal use as well as for education, where both of these items only show mean of 2.40. The highest mean for the negative impacts is on addiction to SNSs, which affect their academic life (3.00). Responses on the positive impacts of SNSs to student academic performance have higher means, which range from 3.20 to 3.70 for all the questions. The majority of respondents clearly indicated that SNSs can be used to discuss assignments (3.40), group discussions (3.70) and also to improve interaction between lecturers and classmates (3.30).
Table 3. Positive impacts of SNSs on students’ academic performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The usage of SNSs is useful in higher educational institutions, because they are an effective communication application.</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Group discussions can be arranged with my classmates using SNSs.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>An appointment can be fixed with my lecturer through SNSs.</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Social networking site is helpful in my studies because I can receive announcements from lecturers and faculty.</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The SNSs help in my studies because I can discuss my assignments with friends.</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Using SNSs improves my interaction with classmates and lecturers</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I use SNSs to facilitate academic activities and coordinate with friends.</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey answers the two research questions highlighted earlier. Most of the students are engage in the use of SNSs for socializing activities rather than for academic purposes. However, most of the respondents do feel that SNSs have a positive impact on their academic performance, due to the fact that SNSs can be used for various academic activities such as communicating with the faculty and university authorities, communicating with lecturers and supervisors, discussing academic topics with classmates and chatting with friends on topics of educational interest. Meanwhile, the negative impacts of SNSs on their academic performance are considerably low.

Therefore, based on the positive preliminary findings of this study, universities and other academic institutions could take advantage of the popularity and positive impact of SNSs to formally incorporate their use in the teaching and learning process. Government regulatory agencies that are responsible for monitoring internet activities, such as the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in Malaysia, as well as the Ministry of Higher Education could also benefit from findings from this kind of study to outline or improve any existing guidelines on internet usage. Updating these guidelines would be useful for students as well as parents, in helping them monitor or provide appropriate advice to their children regarding SNSs.

However, this is only a preliminary phase of the study. The actual data collection with the improved questionnaire to the larger sample should reflect more accurate and significant findings of the phenomenon.
6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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7. REFERENCES


