

Exploring Business Students' Perceptions on Social Network Sites (SNSs) and its Influence on Learning

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Abstract

Social Network Sites (SNSs) is becoming one of the global phenomena with millions of users around the world. One of the issues that arise due to the growth of SNSs is the effect towards students' learning. The aim of this study is to explore business students' perceptions on SNSs and its effects on their learning experience. 327 survey questionnaires were distributed to business students in one of the public university in Malaysia via a random sampling approach. The results demonstrated that students use SNSs to get help from their course mates as well as their tutors on academic matters. In addition, students also found it more convenient to discuss course matters with their colleagues. Majority of the students agreed that SNSs should be used for teaching and learning. Bearing the positive feedbacks from the students, the university management could exploit the advantage by incorporating SNSs as part of the business students' learning process.

Keywords: Social Network Sites, Learning experience, Business students

1. Introduction

With the vast emergence of the technology, the creation of social network sites (SNSs) becomes a big turning point of technological evolution of WWW. SNSs are now becoming a common phenomenon among all walks of life due to its ability to connect people from all over the world, thanks to the development of Web 2.0 by O'Reilly in 2004. These sites connect people from all over the world and become a place where all the virtual communications were done simultaneously without any boundaries. In fact, users can create individual public profiles, interact with real-life friends, and meet other people based on shared interests (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011) and is considered as technologies that enable public articulation of social network (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). (Surowiecki, 2005) regarded SNSs as an architecture of participation that harnesses the wisdom of crowds. The phenomenon of SNSs is also believed to encompass great potential to socialize online learning to a greater extent than before (Bryant, 2007).

Several popular SNS to be named after in chronological order are Friendster (2002) with 90 million members, MySpace (2005) with 75 million members, and Facebook (2006) about 500 million members (Ahmed & Qazi, 2011). Statistics have shown that the Internet users who visit SNS or any blogging site comprise two-third of world's internet users consuming about 10% of the whole time spent on internet and accounts for 65% of internet usage (Ahmed & Qazi, 2011). In a research that was done to a population of 1200 students found that 96% of the students use SNSs (www.scribd.com).

Recognizing the potential of the online framework offered by SNSs, social interactions among users could be exploited as a method to facilitate learning. In the case of university students, they can share experiences and collaborate on certain topics.

The process of learning can be in the form of informal learning and formal learning. Knowledge can be acquired through unstructured and not organized manner in terms of goals, time or instruction is called informal learning, whereas, formal learning is the process of learning that take place in a structured manner.

In a formal learning environment utilizing SNSs, participation from students could be encouraged by allocating some marks for online participation. However, in the scenario of informal learning, the deployment of SNSs largely depends on the users.

Findings from previous research shows that the students' behaviour in using the SNSs could be deployed in terms of learning, where the facet of informal and formal learning could be incorporated into their use of SNSs (W. M. Wan Isa et al, 2012). Therefore, this study seeks to explore students' perceptions regarding the use of SNSs with regard to students' learning experience in the context of students in our university.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 gives some reviews on research relating to SNSs in teaching and learning. Section 3 presented the methodology for the study followed by results and discussions in Section 4. Finally, the conclusions and future work are outlined in Section 5.

2. Literature Review

Various studies on SNSs had been conducted among which involved research in teaching & learning (Griffith, 2008 and Madge et. al, 2009), formal & informal learning ((Cloete & Villiers, 2009), (Ismail, 2010), (Lockyer & Patterson, 2008) and (Bosch, 2009)) and impact on learning ((Suhail & Barges, 2006), (Thomas et. al., 1987), (Kolek & Saunders, 2008), (Pasek et. al., 2009), (Ahmad & Qazi, 2011), (Kircsner and Karpinski, 2010), (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011) and (Stollak et. al, 2011)).

In terms of teaching and learning, (Griffith, 2008) compared the characteristics of Facebook and MySpace focusing on two main aspects: i) membership rules and ii) trust and privacy. Although they concurred that the positive aspects of SNSs in education had started to emerge, they cautioned users on the aspect of trust and privacy since it plays a critical role when SNS are used for the purpose of teaching and learning. In another study by Madge et al (2009) who conducted an online survey regarding the use of Facebook with first year campus-based undergraduates at a British university in 2009. From a total of 213 responses (7% response rate) gathered, they discovered that students believed that Facebook was used most importantly for social reasons, not for formal teaching purposes (although it was sometimes used informally for learning purposes).

In the effort to discover potential adoption of SNSs in formal learning, a survey was performed using online questionnaire to Information Systems and Computer Science lecturers across Southern Africa, in 2009 (Cloete & Villiers, 2009). In this survey, responses were gathered in terms of the use of Facebook as a potential learning tool. Although results from the survey denoted a positive note from the lecturers on the use of Facebook as an academic tool, the deployment is rather slow due to issues such as privacy, lack of competence in using SNSs and the availability of a dedicated secure site to interact with their students. On the contrary, a survey that had been conducted in one of the private universities in Malaysia indicated another view on the possible adoption of SNSs in formal learning (Ismail, 2010). The aim of the survey was to examine international students' acceptance on the use of SNSs to support their learning activities. The main instrument used in the evaluation was the "Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)" model proposed by Venkatesh et al.(2003).The results showed that the international students agreed on the idea that the performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions will lift the behavioral intention of using SNS to support their learning activities. Although the two studies outlined here demonstrated different views on the potential adoption of SNSs in formal learning, it has to be noted that the views were taken from two different perspectives, i.e. one from the lecturers and the other was from the perspective of the students.

From the aspect of SNSs adoption for formal learning, Lockyer & Patterson, 2008, had conducted a study to examine the technology and experience in a formal education context in a regional university in Australia. The study involved postgraduate class group (students and lecturers) within the specialization of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in education by an Education Faculty in the university. Findings from the study indicated positive learning outcomes and experiences for the participants. The study suggested the need for further research into pedagogically sound uses of Web 2.0 technologies. Different findings were observed at the University of Cape Town where a study has been conducted by (Bosch, 2009) to explore students' use of Facebook as well as lecturers' engagement with students via the new social media. All lecturers who were informally surveyed indicated that they routinely ignored friend requests from students and prefer to keep personal information private from students. Bosch discovered that although Facebook allows academic related networking across campus, lecturers may find it challenging to use Facebook due to ICT literacy and privacy issues.

Various studies have been done to observe the impacts of SNS and academic performance among universities students. Suhail & Barges, (2006) found that the excessive usage may cause many psychological, physical, interpersonal and educational problems to users. Positive and negative effects of technology towards the academic performance has also been written among which stated that activities of students are associated with grade-related differences among them (Thomas, Iventosch, & Rohwer, 1987). It is also known that the students spends most of their time on the social networking activities rather spends their time for academic activities, and if this trend continuously happened, this might impact their academic performance. Tuckman, (1975) defined performance as the apparent demonstration of understanding, concepts, skills, ideas and knowledge of a person and proposed that grades clearly depict the performance of a students. Hence, the academic performance must be monitored to track all the influence factors that may be results in positively or negatively affected the student's

academic performance.

Some studies also stated that there is no correlation among computer use and academic performance but some says differently. For example, no relationship was found between time spent on the computer at home and Grade Point Average (GPA) in a sample of adolescents. Findings from (Kolek & Saunders, 2008) reported that there was no correlation between Facebook use and GPA in a sample of students from a public Northeast research university. Study from (Pasek, More, & Hargittai, 2009) also conclude their findings that no relationship was found between FB user and GPA. In addition, a recent study by Ahmed and Qazi (2011) showed that the use of SNSs does not have an adverse impact on their academic performance.

In contrast to the findings regarding no adverse effects of the use of SNSs on students' academic performance, a study conducted by Kirschner and Karpinski, (2010) reported that Facebook have lower mean GPAs and spend fewer hours per week studying on average than FB non-users. These findings are well supported by a comprehensive literature review done by Kuss & Griffiths in 2011. In their study, they reviewed 43 empirical studies with the aim to provide empirical and conceptual insights into the addiction of SNSs among which was to examine negative consequences of SNS usage. Their results indicated negative impacts of SNS usage that include the decrease in real life social community participation and academic achievement, as well as relationship problems, each of which may be indicative of potential addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Other similar findings were also obtained by Stollak & Burklund that shows a negative relationship between time spent on the social network and one's grades, i.e. students who spent more time on Facebook are those with lower grades (Stollak, Vandenberg, & Burklund, 2011).

Numerous feedbacks were obtained regarding the various facets on the use of SNS such as usability, perception, adoption, experience and impacts on students' academic performance. However, most findings were gathered on different grounds, i.e. either from the perspectives of lecturers, students or from the perspectives of both students and lecturers. The difference in the nature of SNSs deployment across countries might also be another contributor to the dissimilarity in the findings. Therefore, we believe that there is a call to conduct a survey within our university in order to gather responses from the students regarding their perceptions on the effect of SNSs on their learning experiences.

3. Methodology

This study is carried out to explore students' perceptions regarding the use of SNSs with regard to students' learning experience. This research was undertaken at one of the public university in Malaysia, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Malaysia. The questionnaire for this study was adapted from Arus Perdana research project UKM-AP-CMNB-01-2010 headed by Prof Dr Mohamed Amin Embi. A survey involving 327 students from the Faculty of Business Management and Accountancy in UniSZA was conducted in 2011. The survey served the purpose of eliciting responses from undergraduate students in the university regarding their perceptions on the use of SNSs in both formal and informal learning. Since this study aims to ascertain responses from students who had been using SNSs for more than one semester, students from Semester 1 was excluded in the survey. At the time the survey was conducted, the programs on offer were programs for Semester 1, Semester 3, and Semester 5. Hence only students from Semester 3 and Semester 5 were involved in the survey. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data obtained. There were three sections in the questionnaire; Section A, Section B and Section C. Section A relates to demographic profile, computer and internet experience while Section B contains general information on SNS usage. Section C is categorized into two subcategories where Section C1 seeks to identify the frequency of use for informal learning while Section C2 focuses on students' perceptions, on formal learning. An outline for the types of questions in each section is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Sections in the Questionnaire

Sections	Subjects	Questions	Number of Questions
A	Demographic profile, computer and internet experience	1 - 8	8
B	General Information on SNS Usage	9 -16	8
C1	Perceptions on Informal Learning	17a - 17c	3
C2	Perceptions on Formal Learning	18a – 18i	9

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Students' Profiles

Table 2 presents the demographic profiles, computer and internet experience of the respondents. Majority of the respondents were female students (72.8%) while the rest (27.2%) were male. More than half of the respondents were in Semester 5 (51.7%) and 48.3% were in Semester 3. The respondents also provided feedback regarding their performance in terms of Grade Point Average (GPA). 71.9% of the students obtained GPA more than 3.0 whereas 28.1% of them obtained less than 3.0. Most of the respondents own a computer (93.3%) and use their notebooks to access the Internet (81.0%). Findings from this section also show that more than half (53.2%) have good and excellent computer skills whilst 41.6% considered themselves to have an average computer skills. Of this, 5.2% rated themselves to have poor computer skills. In terms of the hours spent on the Internet, only 4.6% of the respondents spent less than one hour per day, while 52.6% of them spent between one to three hours per day. In addition, majority were usually online between 5 pm to 12 midnight.

Overall, it can be noted that more than half of the students have sufficient computer skills and have easy access to the Internet via their own notebook. Time spent on the Internet can be considered moderate where they usually accessed the Internet during evening until midnight.

Table 2: Demographic profiles of Respondents (Q1 – Q8)

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	89	27.2
	Female	238	72.8
Semester	Sem 3	158	48.3
	Sem 5	169	51.7
GPA	2.0 - 2.5	14	4.3
	2.51 - 3.0	78	23.9
	3.01 - 3.5	168	51.4
	> 3.5	67	20.5
Computer Ownership	Yes	305	93.3
	No	22	6.7
Access Method	Own notebook	265	81.0
	Public Computer	38	11.6
	Others	12	3.7
	Personal and Public Computer	11	3.4
	All	1	0.3
Computer skills	Poor	17	5.2
	Average	136	41.6
	Good	153	46.8
	Excellent	21	6.4
Hours spent Internet	< 1 hr	15	4.6
	1 - 3 hrs	172	52.6
	3 - 5 hrs	93	28.4
	> 5 hrs	47	14.4
Time of Internet access	8 am - 5 pm	43	13.1
	5 pm - 12 am	235	71.9
	12 am - 8 am	49	15.0

4.2 General Information on Usage of SNSs

Table 3 shows that all respondents have their own SNSs account and in fact, it can be observed from the second row that some respondents have more than one SNSs account with majority of them are members of Facebook. 97.9% of the students rated Facebook as their favorite SNSs account, with majority of them (74.3%) had already been Facebook members between one to three years. Slightly more than half of the respondents (55.0%) spent between one to three hours on SNSs and 74.3% of them access the sites between 5 pm to 12 midnight. On the other hand, it is interesting to discover that there is a similar pattern in the log in frequency between one to two times per day (43.4%), and three to four times per day (42.2%). Next, 7.6% of them log in to their SNSs accounts five to six times per day while the rest of the respondents (6.7%) log into their accounts more than six times per day. Finally, 55.4% respondents recorded that they communicate most with their friends using their SNSs accounts and 30.3% use their accounts to communicate with their family and friends.

Table 3: General Information on SNS Usage (Q9 – Q16)

Categories	Items	Frequency	%
SNS account	Yes	327	100
	No	0	0
SNS membership	Facebook	325	99.4
	Twitter	53	16.2
	MySpace	83	25.4
	Friendster	56	17.1
	Tagged	39	11.9
	Others	20	6.1
Favourite SNS account	Facebook	320	97.9
	Twitter	3	0.9
	Friendster	2	0.6
	Others	2	0.6
Favourite SNS membership	Less than a year	40	12.2
	1-3 years	243	74.3
	More than 3 years	44	13.5
Time spent per day on SNS	Less than 1 hour	48	14.7
	Between 1 to 3 hours	180	55.0
	Between 3 to 5 hours	75	22.9
	More than 5 hours	24	7.3
Time of SNS access	8 am – 5 pm	36	11.0
	5 pm – 12 am	243	74.3
	12 am – 8 am	48	14.7
Log in frequency per day	1 -2 times	142	43.4
	3 - 4 times	138	42.2
	5 - 6 times	25	7.6
	> 6 times	22	6.7
Communicate most using SNS	Family	16	4.9
	Friends	181	55.4
	Family and Friends	99	30.3
	Family, Friends and Lectures	24	7.3
	Friends and Lectures	3	0.9
	Family, Friends and Others	1	0.3
	All	3	0.9

4.3 Perceptions on Informal Learning

This part of the survey presents a section to instigate responses from students regarding their perceptions on the use of SNSs for informal learning. At present, there is no enforcement in UniSZA with respect to the use of SNSs in formal learning. Therefore, students' perceptions are much anticipated to provide insights into the deployment of SNSs in informal learning in UniSZA. Results from Table 4 generally show that students believed that that it would be more convenient for them to discuss course matters with their friends using SNSs. Further, it can also be observed that their second highest perception on informal learning is that they think using SNSs helps improve their academic performance.

Table 4: Respondents Perceptions on Informal Learning (Question 17a- 17c)

No	Statements	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree
		Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
1	Using SNSs could help improve my academic performance.	73 (22.3%)	135 (41.3%)	119 (36.4%)
2	I spend more time on SNSs for academic work	114 (34.9)	109 (33.3%)	104 (31.5%)
3	I find that it is more convenient to discuss course matters through SNSs with my friends.	75 (22.9%)	106 (32.4%)	146 (44.7%)

In addition, students took the initiatives to use SNSs to contact their course mates to arrange for group discussions. Other than that, they also utilized the applications to get some help from their friends on academics matters such as assignments and projects. Based on our findings, this could serve as an indication that the students use SNSs as a method for informal learning.

4.4 Perceptions on Formal Learning

Table 5 shows the results where respondents expressed their perceptions regarding the use of SNSs for Formal Learning. They were in total agreement on the idea to use SNSs for teaching and learning where this finding conforms to the positive responses as gathered in Table 4. In fact, as can be seen from the results 56% of the students agree that the university make use of SNSs a form of communication. This is followed by using SNSs for teaching and learning (54.5%). 52.6% of the respondents agreed that they would like to be contacted through SNSs for academic matters.

Table 5: Respondents Perceptions on Formal Learning (Question 18a- 18h)

No	Statements	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree
		Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
1.	I use SNSs to check the profiles of my lecturers or academic staffs of my university.	91 (27.8%)	97 (29.7%)	139 (42.5%)
2.	I use SNSs to contact my lecturers for formal academic matters.	108 (33.0%)	111 (33.9%)	108 (33.0%)
3.	I think SNSs should be used for teaching/learning.	56 (17.2%)	93 (28.4%)	178 (54.5%)
4.	I would like my university to contact me through SNSs.	92 (28.1%)	52 (15.9%)	183 (56%)
5.	I would like my lecturers to contact me through SNSs for academic matters.	91 (29.8%)	64 (19.6%)	172 (52.6%)
6.	I think it is appropriate for lecturers to use SNSs for teaching/learning.	81 (24.7%)	90 (27.5%)	156 (47.7%)
7.	The university should deliver learning/course materials through SNSs.	69 (21.1%)	98 (30.0%)	156 (47.7%)
8.	E-Learning that is delivered via SNSs will definitely help me learn.	60 (18.3%)	92 (28.1%)	175 (53.5%)

The answer could have also been interpreted as the notion expressed by the students that SNSs usage does not affect their academic performance. Yet still, leaning on their positive responses pertaining to the use of SNSs in both informal and formal learning, we can still exploit the opportunity to incorporate SNSs as part of the students' learning processes.

5. Conclusions

Previous findings regarding the relationship between the use of SNSs and students' academic performance are eclectic, hence presenting the need to conduct a study specific to a group of students, i.e. students in a particular university. Different perceptions, various stages of adoptions, attitudes, commitment and even e-Learning policy in an institution are pivotal to ensure that SNSs could be best exploited to suit the needs of a learning community. Results from this study bring about benefits to two main stakeholders; students (the learning community) and the management of the university where e-Learning policy of the university could further be enhanced by taking into account the use of SNSs in both informal and formal learning.

This study has its limitation such as the selection of sampling that only included students from one faculty within the university. In future, we anticipate being able to conduct a more comprehensive survey that would include larger sampling size across all faculties, and to gain feedbacks from the perspective of the lecturers.

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