Barriers to the Adoption of social Technologies in Higher Education

Morgan Stephanie, Benson Vladlena, *Kingston University, UK*

Introduction

The significance of social networking is no longer contested; it is viewed as a game-changing innovation set to transform the face of higher education. Social media is on its way to earning a distinctive position amongst educational technologies, attracting the attention of academic and industry researchers. The adoption of social media for academic purposes became inevitable with the wide acceptance of the tool by end-users. Social media in higher education took on a multi-faceted role: serving as networking enabler, marketing and recruitment tool, collaboration, teaching and learning tool as well as a medium presenting career management and entrepreneurship opportunities (Benson and Morgan, 2014).

Earlier technology had an incremental influence on learning and teaching innovation. The advent of blogs, electronic assessment, wikis, gamification, etc. has had a significant impact on higher education as new tools became available to instructors (Pimmer, Linxen, & Grohien, 2012). New ways of doing traditional things meant that technology represented incremental innovation. Since the emergence of the Internet social media is the key technology which now has a pervasive influence on the educational sector (Benson, Morgan, & Fillipaious, 2010).

Social media is a cross-disciplinary field. A substantial body of research on social networking research has been accumulated in the areas of psychology and sociology (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012), criminology (Conger, Pratt, & Loch, 2013) and marketing (Fodor & Hoffman, 2010), social capital theory (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009) and information systems research (Smith, Dinev, & Xu, 2011). Social media includes Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs, virtual worlds such as Second Life, YouTube, vlogs, etc. These various media are increasingly used by students throughout their time in Higher Education and beyond, while academics including from the fields not directly related to technology are beginning to embrace social media adoption.

The Dark Side of Social Technologies

Overloaded by information, outsmarted by smartphones, overtweeted and facebooked out….welcome to the world of a technology savvy student owning a tablet with every app and a smartphone for every latest communication craze. What we are witnessing on campus is swiftly taking over the world – the digital dependency (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While many are far from the state of technology addiction, people are finding themselves reaching for their never-too-far iPhone first thing in the morning before even brushing their teeth. The good news is that the positive impact of information technologies, including social media, outweighs its negative aspects (Benson & Morgan, 2014). This explains why there are fewer publications on the adverse effects of technology, however the 'dark-side' should not be ignored.

According to recent studies people feel pressured into checking their messages even when off work; ubiquitous technology creates a disruptive effect on both social life and productivity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Research shows that social networks, Skype and instant messaging lead to stress

induced by multitasking at work, which in turn leads to monetary losses for organisations. Addiction has been linked to overuse of social media and is a cause of many other psychological effects including loss of confidence, decline of face to face communication skills and break up of personal relationships as well as depression (see Van den Eijnden et al., 2008). Consumers have been shown to have high levels of trust in social media, which results in vast quantities of self-disclosed information and increased risk to personal information security (Smith, Dinev, & Xu, 2011).

The Barriers to Social Technologies Adoption

While extant literature on privacy and social networking is plentiful, the area of information security in social networking context has been largely downplayed in the Higher Education context. Similarly, the negative psychological issues sometimes experienced are not considered in-depth. However the awareness of the 'dark side 'of social media is growing. The research to be discussed in this paper includes our own quantitative study of Business School students. This confirms that there is often a psychological pressure to take part which can become problematic - 35% of students in our survey agreed or strongly agreed that they feel unsettled if they do not regularly log on to their social network. Furthermore many young people (under 25) are moving away from Facebook to social chat apps on their mobiles. Mobile applications (Apps) such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, WeChat (China) and Kakaotalk (Korea) are gaining users by the millions. Young people find they offer a more personal, almost private form of communication with only those who are in your network and, importantly, do not leave a permanent digital footprint. Again the implications of all of this for HE are as yet unclear.

Furthermore, a qualitative exploratory study of UK Business academics revealed their general favourable perception of social technologies. In line with (Rogers, 1995) there are instructors pioneering social technology integration, while others adopt a more cautious approach. However, some are quite concerned about the institutional implications of information security and privacy breaches of students inadvertently opening up personal data to others. Furthermore, the interviews with staff revealed the need to 'enculturalise' students in the formal/university-led usage of Facebook and other sites. Instructors voice the lack of student understanding of the private and public dichotomy, or the formal and informal sides to their profiles and implications for personal branding, so important for future career management (Benson, Morgan, & Fillipaious, 2010).

Implications

Whichever type of social networking users are engaged in, social media activity produces a large volume of user generated content, which many would consider private, commercially or security sensitive (Conger, Pratt, & Loch, 2013). Through an in-depth discussion of a range of issues surrounding the negative impact of social media and technologies on individuals and HE organisations, and discussion of our own research regarding students' and academics' attitudes towards security and the potential for negative experiences with social media, we envisage creating a rich account of the dark side of social networking applications as well as opening the debate for further exploration of this challenging topic.

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