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Infusing Social Media in Teaching and Learning (TnL) at Tertiary Institutions: A Case of Effective Communication in Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM)

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Abstract

In Teaching and Learning (TnL) process, the success of disseminating fast information to the students seem to be hampered by the infrequent use of its e-learning system. Students are more likely to engage and communicate through social media. This paper aims to investigate the frequency of social media use among undergraduates in USIM and analyze their perception on the effect of social media towards effective communication in TnL. Data were collected using survey. From the students' perspectives, this paper intends to highlight the findings on benefits of infusing the social media in ensuring effective communication among lecturers-students-lecturers and students-peers.

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1. Introduction

Internet technology has allowed users to connect and socialize through digital social media, which can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Digital social media applications have revolutionized the way we communicate. People of all ages, from varied locations are constantly hooked to their personal smart phones, laptops or tablets

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updating and responding to incoming ‘Tweets’, Facebook News Feed, WhatsApp Chat, and endless threads.

In other words, these communications via cyberspace have prominently taken over the ‘old ways’ of communication between sender and his/her targeted recipients; using phone calls, SMS, snail mails and e-mails, including the virtual notice boards (e-learning system). Relatively, as compiled by Mohamed Amin Embi (2013), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) is equipped with its own Open Educational Resources (OER) or e-learning system known as GOALS (Global Open Access Learning System). With its inception in 2011, USIM GOALS has since undergone periodic upgrading process. From uploading Course Outlines, posting notices, setting up Online Quizzes to initiating Online Forum, USIM lecturers have utilized GOALS in their teaching and learning (TnL) activities. But when it comes to the collection and dissemination of information between two affected parties (lecturer-students), the slight drawback would be in the students’ infrequent checking of their GOALS account which further resulting in communication breakdown.

Could it be that these Generation Y students are prone to updating their status and communicating with one another via the social media than relying to the ‘old ways’ as “to them, technology is their natural ally, a necessity rather than a luxury, the solution to all imaginable problems”? (Barna, 1995, p. 46). Therefore this study is conducted with the aim to investigate the communications among teachers/lecturers and students. The objectives are to identify the use of social media among undergraduates in USIM and to identify their perception on the effect of social media towards the effectiveness of the communication in TnL processes.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Effective communication*

Usually students are being blamed for not accepting or responding to a message delivered by the lecturer, however it is frequently that the failure in the sender’s encoding process or the inept choice of channels resulting in a poor communication. In the context of this paper, the channels or medium of communication is discussed.

Heinze and Procter (2005) highlighted three challenges with respect to online communication in a blended learning: i) too much communication, ii) off topic communication and iii) zero communication. However, as argued by Ocak (2011), lecturers faced difficulties to engage students in asynchronous discussions in blended learning approach. Donnelly (2010) suggested the availability of appropriate communication tools or medium to implement a successful Teaching and Learning in a blended approach classroom. Communication medium were critical factors associated with student perceptions of collaborative learning, social presence, and satisfaction (So and Brush 2008). Ocak (2011) found that lack of effective communication is one of the reasons why lecturers and students did not use e-learning.

Several academicians worldwide have infused the use of popular technology (social media) in their classrooms for getting regular feedback (from students) as well as giving instructions to them. In his online article, Sabo (2014) gives credible examples on how professors and teachers in colleges and high schools resort to using the mainstream social media such as personal blogs, social network sites (SNS) like Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr as a communication platform. As suggested by Pinzaru and Mitran (2013, p. 225), SNS like Facebook could serve as an ‘information-delivery tool’ and an ‘interface’, or connecting device to advocate interaction between the teacher and the students.

According to Sabo (2014), both social media and online communication have facilitated both Professor Draxler and Peter Callas in Illinois and Oregon respectively in their task of monitoring students’ progress inside and outside the classroom. Interestingly, another teacher from Freedom High School in Tampa, Brandon Haas has relied on a web-based application called I Witness to impart essential information to his students (Sabo, 2014). The programme is equipped with similar social media style message board (e.g. Facebook Status) that allows teacher to make announcement on any changes of class time or assignment deadlines. The added feature would be in its “secure, controlled communications forum” accessible only by specific teacher and his/her allocated students (Sabo, 2014).

Being digital natives, these students and their IT-savvy lecturers, constantly hail to this new medium of communication (social media) where they can get immediate feedback and acute response on anything (academic and personal). Nevertheless, at the same time, they are always in fear of their privacy being compromised. With this (privacy) in mind, application software like Office 365 has gone to the extent of introducing a private social network

as convincing solution to enhance the TnL. In an online magazine, columnist Rama (2013) gives a promising overview on the upcoming rival of Facebook applications, known as Yammer. This private social network has been integrated with Office 365 using “user mapping” features (Spataro, 2013). Unlike Facebook, any communication is inaccessible to the public (outside of the University).

Studies by Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) concludes that social media (Facebook and other similar SNS) foster active participation from Generation Y students as they are comfortable to be using technology or as Sternberg (2012) terms them as incessantly ‘fetishising technological literacy’. Even if there are inhibited learners in classrooms, where they avoid participation in the activities that they cannot do well (Littlejohn, 2000), they can always mask themselves using Facebook, Twitter ID or any other SNS.

3. Methodology

The methodology used consists of research design, instrumentation, data collection and analysis. It was adopted in order to achieve the stated objectives. As this research aims to investigate the communications among teachers/lecturers and students, the quantitative strategy (a questionnaire) method was used during this research.

3.1. Sampling and data collection

According to Leedy (1997) the more important elements in survey research are randomization and bias and the descriptive survey method demands that the researcher select from the general population a sample population that will be both logically and statistically defensible. Participants for this study were chosen randomly from the students in Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). A total of 263 students from different academic program participated in the survey.

3.2. Questionnaire development

Collis and Hussey (2003) stated that a questionnaire is a list of carefully structured questions with a view to eliciting reliable responses from a chosen sample. In other words, the researcher attempts to measure various kinds of characteristic using questionnaires. In order to determine the suitability of data collection as to rationalize generalization, a survey was used in this study to learn perceptions (students) about the communication in the TnL via the social media.

4. Results and discussion

A total of 263 students from different academic programs in two (2) faculties (Faculty of Science and Technology (FST), and Faculty of Quranic and Sunnah Studies (FPQS)) in Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) responded to the survey questions. The results of the survey are discussed in the following sections:

4.1. Demographics

The survey was responded by 263 respondents, where 204 female and 59 males. The age range for all respondents is between 18 – 22 years old. The academic programs for the respondents are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1:

Table 1. Respondents' academic programs.

Academic Programs	Faculty	No of Respondents
Actuarial Science and Risk Management (ASRM)	FST	48
Financial Mathematics (FM)	FST	52
Applied Physics (AP)	FST	52
Industrial Chemistry Technology (ICT)	FST	63
Sunnah Studies and Information Management	FPQS	48

4.2. Members and use of social media

A total of 253 respondents are members of any social media, and the remaining 10 of the total respondents were not a member of any social media. Based on the results from the survey, majority of the students are IT-savvy and enjoying the benefits of social media by becoming the member of the social media. Based on the total of 253 respondents, Table 2 shows the social media where the respondents are subscribed to. It seems that the popular social media subscribed by USIM's students are Facebook and Twitter.

Table 2. Number of respondents who are members of the Social Media.

Social Media	No of Respondents	Social Media	No of Respondents
Facebook	252	LinkedIn	6
Twitter	162	Google++	132
Instagram	114	Tagged	10
YouTube	128	Flickr	8
MySpace	32	Others	20

In responding to the question regarding the frequency of respondents to use the social media for educational purposes, 155 respondents (61.3%) (based on the 253 respondents who are members of any social media) responded they "often" use the social media for educational purposes, while 98 respondents (38.7%) either use "rarely or never" use the social media for educational purposes.



Fig. 1. Experience of respondents in using social media

Figure 1 illustrates the time duration of how long the 253 respondents have been using the social media. About 87% (220 out of 253) of the respondents have used social media for 3 and more years. 90% of them use social media less than 6 hours daily.

Figure 2 illustrates how the respondents think Social Media has an effect on the effectiveness of the communication in TnL processes.

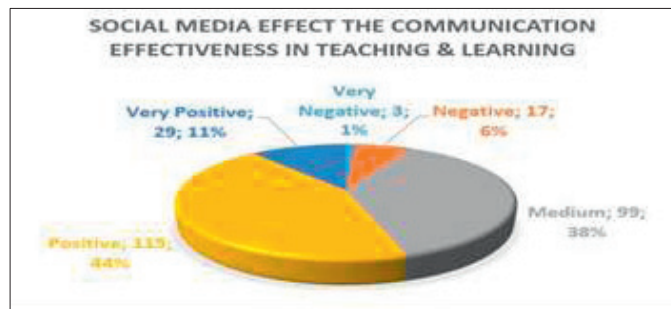


Fig. 2. Social Media affects the effectiveness of communication TnL processes

In responding to the question regarding the respondents' views on the benefits of the social media in TnL. 140 respondents (53.2%) responded they "often" use the social media to discuss their assignments or projects, while 123 respondents (46.8%) either use "rarely or never" use the social media for educational purposes. In addition to that, students also highlighted the fact that social media are highly used for keeping in touch with classmates, very useful academically, help to develop social skills and play a large role in their campus life.

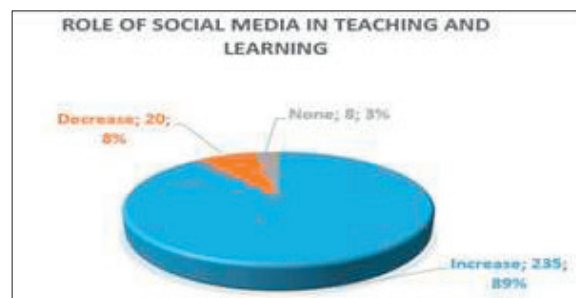


Fig. 3. Role of social media in TnL processes

Lastly, the graph for the role of social media in the teaching and learning processes is shown in Figure 3. Tabor (2007) had recommended active participation between lecturers and students in ensuring good communication with the help of feedback channels with students. The findings have indicated that social media are preferable as the effective communication medium between lecturers and students. Therefore the lecturers need to apply the social media in their method of teaching to ensure effective communication or otherwise recommend to the institution on academic social network platforms such as Course Network or Zcholar that implement the concept of social media in learning management system.

5. Conclusion

Technology should be used effectively especially in disseminating prompt information and knowledge to the intended recipients. As communication between lecturers and students is one of the important elements in a successful TnL processes, it is high time for the IT-savvy students and Tech-savvy lecturers to fully utilize the digital Social Media applications and infuse them wisely.

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