

SOCIAL NETWORKING AND BLOGS AMONG STUDENTS: A THREAT OR BLESSING

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ABSTRAK

The growth of social media such as blogs become more sophisticated nowadays in terms of delivering information, interacting, educating and many more. Blogs or weblogs are online journals or diaries which allowed users to record opinions, information, upload photos or video and etc on regular basis. Teenagers stated the highest users of new media, were much more likely than adults to blog and they were more likely to read blogs. As a main source of information, Internet blogs allow readers to interact negatively or positively through comments and participate actively in public opinion. Freedom in finding information through Internet channels lead to more open space for uncertainty or false information. Thus, Internet would be blamed due to misconduct by certain people who unconsciously aware the risks that might happen. Lack of tool or mechanism that helps to filter out all the negative elements of society might shake the stability and unity among races, religious, social class in Malaysia. The presence of fake information and defamation can also deflect thoughts of present and future generations. Besides, the facility to abuse social networking site to commit crime caused students feel irresponsible to find victim on blog or social networking sites. Emergence of several cases related to abuse of social networking and blogs are currently increase and this can be stop if students able to see and make most thoughtful and selective decision on social media. Blogs can also be a tool to condemn others such as to show disgrace for someone, slander, insignificant info, porn pictures and many more. Unfortunately, this new media stated positive respond in motivating students towards better social life and education as well. Nelson (2006) claimed blogs play a significant role in identifying trends, exchanging information and reporting news and opinions. The best practice and preferably social networking and blogs should be used to strengthen relationship and various benefits to themselves and the community as well as to avoid misuse of social networking and blogs that sometimes contribute to hostility and destruction. Indirectly, social networking and blogs can help

to produce a generation of integrity, responsible and honorable to life, family, society and nation.

Keywords: *Social networking, blogs, students, threat, blessing*

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies are becoming more sophisticated nowadays. It has turned into one of the key factors in our daily lives and increasingly important in the future. Blogs or weblogs are online journals or diaries which allowed users to record opinions, information, etc on a regular basis (Rodmans, 2012). Hsu and Lin (2008) explained that originally a blog is an online writing tool that helped its users keep track of their own online records, but the blog quickly turned into a key part of online culture. Blog entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order, with the most recent entries most visible on the blog page (Blood, 2000). As a main source of information, Internet blogs allow readers to interact negatively or positively through comments and participate actively in public opinion (King, 2008). In addition, blogs can be considered as social networking sites if they include videos, audios, photos and comments or replies (Federal Trade Commission, 2007). Meanwhile, the term *blogosphere* is the collective term used to represent the universe of all blogs within the virtual community (Kaye, 2005).

The Internet has become a public sphere for debate, discussion, dissemination and even just hanging out (Boyd, 2006); it came from humble beginnings to quickly become an international means of idea sharing (Tapscott, 2009; Tapscott and William, 2006). With a popular issue, a blog can attract tremendous attention and exert great influence on society such as “War on Terrorism” after the September 11, 2001 attacks; the fall of Trent Lott; the controversies of the Iraq war; the 2004 US presidential elections (Hsu & Lin, 2008); and also Malaysia’s election in 2008 has resulted in five states (Pulau Pinang, Kedah, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur) controlled by the opposition including Kelantan which continued to be dominated by the opposition party (PAS). “Blogging is a way for people to express themselves and write anything that comes across their minds. It does not necessarily have to be political or cultural; a blogger can write about his daily life” (Hazaimah, 2009, p7) as cited by (Makhadmeh, 2011). It has been said that a blog has become a new tool and significant way to disseminate information.

Today, life becomes more meaningful and easy when everybody owned *i-pad*, *i-pod*, *tablet*, *smart phone* etc to communicate and use media. The concept of global village by Marshall McLuhan can be seen through these

technologies where communication and information can be distributed without boundaries. Thus, it managed to change the forms of thought, ideology, culture and a variety of external elements from other countries without restrictions and controls. (Mohamed Imran, Mohd Yadman, Mohamad Zaki, 2005)

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION ON SOCIAL NETWORKING AND BLOGS

There are many new blogs created daily and number of bloggers is increasing rapidly. With the availability of free web such as *WordPress*, *Blogspot* etc allowed students to create their own blogs and also communicate with others. Sysomos (2010) claimed that the largest blogging demographic is young people. Students are increasingly using blogs for personal commentaries or for certain courses which allow them to get specific info about faculty such as subjects, validation, examination week, activities or event held by the faculty. It becomes the main tool because total numbers of students are high and blog is the fastest way to disseminate information. Communicating through social media has not only become a trend but an addictive way to communicate with others (K. Zammit, 2012). Moreover, majority of teens (84%) reported owning at least one personal media device such as a desktop or laptop computer, a cell phone or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005) as cited by (Bovitz, 2007, para 5)

According to Lenhart and Madden (2005), teens were much more likely than adults to blog and they were more likely to read blogs. Nineteen percent of online youth have created their own blogs. Thirty-eight percent of all online teens, read blog. As for adults, only twenty-seven percent of adult Internet users read blogs. According to Armstrong & McAdams (2009), male bloggers are perceived to be more credible than female bloggers. Many studies suggest that the posts of female bloggers “are more often journals or diary entries”.

Kaye (2005) claimed that interacting with Weblogs or even merely reading them, gratifies excitement, entertainment, and relaxation needs. Johnson et al (2008) added that weblogs provide a sense of belonging and being part of the larger blogosphere where bloggers and their followers are in the know and on top of latest political and nonpolitical issues. He also mentioned that there are many reason of reading blogs such as community, comfort, verification of information in other media, search for more information, writing experience, writing comments, reading other people’s comments, collecting ideas about a subject, relaxation, passing time, education, fulfillment of parasocial needs, and alleviation of boredom and loneliness. Lenhart and Fox (2006) also mentioned that the most common reason for

blogging is to express oneself, communicating with others and sharing knowledge. As Bovitz (2007) stated that for many teens, blogs is a way to meet people, share things about themselves, and communicate with friends.

As shown in table 1, there are five top social media in Malaysia; Facebook stated the highest user (75.5%) compared to Blogspot (42.4%), Wordpress (16.1%), Twitter (7.6%) and Metacafe (5.6%) while Malaysia population stated 26,160,256 people and 64.7% from the population is internet users. According to Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission Statistic (2011), teenagers or student (15-19 years) stated the highest users of Internet (19.2%) in 2009 and 17.9% in 2008 compared to other age range.

Table 1

Percentage of 5 Top Social Media in Malaysia as at 2011

Name of social media	Percentage
Facebook	75.5% reach
Blogspot	42.4% reach
Wordpress	16.1% reach
Twitter	7.6% reach
Metacafe	5.6% reach

Source: Burson Marsteller Asia Pacific, 2011

CONCERN TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING AND BLOGS

It's true that telecommunications companies are competing in providing interactive internet plan with lower budget. Especially students nowadays, they can have special rate with certain plan which is much more economical compare to previous days. However, this resulting to students becomes more concentrating on social networking and blogs and starts losing their attention to surroundings. They can be categorized as social networking and blogs' addicted because of time spend on social media. Moreover, students' social interaction in real world will start to decrease. Although they have many friends on social networking and blogs but they have less interaction in real world, thus less communication and social skills.

Technology and communication have become interchangeable terms for teens (Bovitz, 2007). Teenagers or students used technology as their primary form of communication. They usually seek the approval from peers,

and technology has created an instantaneous method for teens to gain approval of friends through social media (K. Zammit, 2012). According to Rhoades, Thomas, & Davis (2009), teens are reported that their friends have a major influence on decisions that they make. Another study by Rennekamp (1990) found that 51% of teenagers reported that their friends have a greater influence on their decision making as compared to their parents. Moreover, male students are more influence to peers than female students.

Most of blogs today are prone to entertainment, gossip, fashion and the worst part is when blog become a tool to condemn others. Some users post inappropriate pictures and comments and posting too personal of information on blog (Zammit, 2012). Students who are too focused on *twitter, facebook, youtube, myspace, blogs* etc lead to social problems such as meeting strangers that lead to rape cases, deception, money scam, baby dumping, gambling, and many more. They ignore their precious times to study and instead become more active interacting and participating in social networking and blogs. Students are too busy updating status, checking messages, chatting online etc that they will forget to check the priority work in their life. As a result, they will not concentrate and comfortable, sleepy and sometimes escape from classes without any purpose. Studies showed that teens enjoy learning about their friends by reading posts and information displayed on social networking sites (Bovitz, 2007). Meanwhile Lenhart & Fox (2006) explained that “37% of bloggers cite “my life and experiences” as a primary topic of their blog.

There are also cases where students may not aware of their need in keeping their personal information carefully such as personal photographs that will fall to strangers and later lead to pornography, prostitution, sex, kidnapping and human trafficking (Mohamed Imran, Mohd Yadman, Mohamad Zaki, 2005). They also claimed that students willing to cheat and steal money just to buy a mobile phone “top up” in order to connect to internet (Nor Aishah Abdul Aziz, Mohd Zolkifli Abd Hamid, & Ismail Saliyan, 2012). Besides, they become disrespectful with parents and against moral values when failed to fulfill their needs.

Students who are addicted to social networking and blogs, may not notice how much time they've spent. There is a possibility that students can become obesity where most of the time spends in front of the computer, chatting, eating snacks and without physical exercise or activities(Biusset14, 2012). The long usage of these technologies including the devices such as computer, smartphones, laptop etc will harm students indirectly such as radioactive effect, body pain, sore eyes and many more.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING AND BLOGS TO STUDENTS' EDUCATION

The development of Internet technology has changed how teenagers communicate and participate in many events. Technology has proved how teenagers learn and encouraged more action-based learning. Understanding the current trends in utilizing technology among youth is essential in addressing their needs and communicating with youth in today's society (Kennedy, 2010). Majority of undergraduates' students spend more time on social networking websites and blogs. Many universities and colleges have started using *Facebook* and *Twitter* in the classroom. Students used online as a medium to share their thoughts, will be more interested in joining discussion in the classroom. This will help them to be more effectual with ideas, creative, more independent and ability to think and analyze subject.

Richardson (2003) claimed that blogs in classroom explain how online discussions stimulate debate and motivate students to do close reading of the text. He also believed that "blogs have great potential for educational use, both on their own and as extensions of the traditional classroom". They enable students to share and collaborate, providing a forum in which anyone can participate. It has been confirmed by Cross (1999) that this is the active learning activity among students. A study named "Technology as a Change Agent for the Teaching Process," by Johnson, Schwab and Foa (1999) explained an interesting look at the value of group work in research and learning. They advocate that technology can provide this necessary link between students to facilitate group work which fosters better learning.

Besides using a written document, either text or web-based, new media technology can improve classroom environment. Fife (2008) finds "online discussions to be an ideal enhancement to face-to-face discussions by involving students who hesitate to participate in classroom discussion and by enhancing the depth and insight reached in the face-to-face-discussion". Dewitt & Dickson, (2003) as cited by E.Kennedy (2010) explained about learning modalities where basic understanding of how people learn can enable creating assignments that are not designed to showcase the technology, but instead have been developed to enhance learning through using technology.

In addition, because technology was fun and innovative, students look forward to their assignments. Anson (1999) claimed that students would move smoothly between electronic downloads of information, e-mails to and from instructors, and electronic submission of assignments. Beyond being the cure for all the ills of higher education, it was predicted that technology in the classroom would quickly become ubiquitous. Therefore, social

networking and blogs help students to be more creative and pro active in submitting their assignments.

Some bloggers and blog readers tend to see blogs as a new and better journalism that is opinionated, independent and personal (Palser, 2005; Reynolds, 2003). As stated by Robideau & Santl (2011), social networking is the number one activity on the web and is replacing e-mail communication in the younger generations. Some blogs such as *Islamic* blogs are useful in educating Islamic moral values among students. Study showed that articles about Islam such as *doa*, *akhlak*, *guide*, *advice* and *hijab* become the main topics for students to read, followed by articles about activities such as *ceramah*, *photography* etc and lastly article about bloggers' personal life. Besides, *doa* such as prayers to enlighten the heart is one of daily muslim *doa* that should be learned and used as a practice and inspiration of life (Dzaa Imma Abd Latiff, Noor Ashmalia Mohd Ashraff, Siti Nur Farrah Faadiyah Ab. Ghani & Mastura Mansur, 2012).

ROLE OF EDUCATOR TOWARDS CHANGES IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Student is a dynamic group in terms of thought and action. Educators and parents should controlled and manage students' attitudes wisely from being into negative behaviors. As mentioned by Azizi et al, (2012) these factors will contribute to uncomfortable behavior among students and later lead to absentees, disrespectful and involved with discipline problems. Students that participate in such attitude show that they need direction and guidance. Bovitz (2007) explained that educators and parents need to aware, help and informed teenagers to understand appropriate ways of communicating and sharing information with others.

Open minded educators should accept the changes in a positive way. Educators are encouraged to use social networking and blogs as a tool to communicate with students. Even though, face to face communication is proven effective but it is not always possible. Kinsey (2010) said, using social media is an easy and cost effective way to extend educational reach and disseminate research-based information to the community. Online communication is a fast-paced way to educate a wide range of people at any time and has increasingly popular (Kinsey, 2010). It has an easy learning style where students have the chance to learn information regardless of time or location.

As technology develops, educator should be creative in adapting new changes in teaching and learning method. K. Zammit (2011) examined that educators can post video clips on *Facebook* and *YouTube* to promote

educational programs or teach online users through video demonstrations. According to Case and Hino (2010), educators have to compete with user groups that generate content quickly and disseminate it widely. The interactive media helps students to concentrate more to the subject compare to the traditional way where audio and video played an important role in learning. As they focused to the subject, students indirectly perform better in study.

Educators should change the negative perception towards social networking and blogs among students and public. For example, social networking and blogs contribute to social ills where many improper web sites influence students' moralities and harmful behavior. Therefore, it is educators' responsibilities to guide and educate students on moral values and attitudes from posting negative entries, slanders, sexy and nude pictures and many more. This will create a better generation person with high integrity and morality towards national security and development.

CONCLUSION

The usage of social networking and blogs among students should be balanced. They must know what priority to them, in order to manage their study wisely. For example, determine and allocate time wisely in preparing assignments, revision and social activities. Students must know how to differentiate and choose what is appropriate and inappropriate for them. Educators and parents should guide and educate them in selecting proper website and the consequences of spending too much time on social networking and blogs. Moreover, parents should limit their children activities on social networking and blogs and avoid giving new gadgets as tool to reward them.

Communication and media can be used as a platform to influence students in practicing good values in lives. Moral decline of young people should receive serious attention among educators. The function of this technology provides an opportunity for educators and students to build an active learning environment and meaningful in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social. In conclusion, the best practice and preferably social networking and blogs should be used to strengthen relationship and various benefits to themselves and the community as well as to avoid misuse of social networking and blogs that sometimes contribute to hostility and destruction. Indirectly, social networking and blogs can help to produce a generation of integrity, responsible and honorable to life, family, society and nation.

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