A Study to Evaluate the Social Media Trends among University Students

Dr. Irshad Hussain*

Dr. Irshad Hussain, Department of Education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Bahawalpur, Pakistan
irshad.hussain@iub.edu.pk

Abstract

The study was conducted to a). examine the trend of using social media among university students, b). evaluate reasons behind using social media, and c). identify the problems of university students in using social media. The population of the study consisted of all 4th semester students of Faculty of Education of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The sample size comprised of 600 students taken through convenient sampling technique. A questionnaire was developed for data collection. The research tool was finalized after its pilot testing. The study revealed that majority (90%) of the students was inclined to use face-book. They used social media for exchanging academic activities and developing social networks throughout the world. They used such media for sharing their learning experiences with their colleagues and international community. It was obvious from the study that social media played a crucial role in promoting collaboration and linkage to develop Virtual Community across the world. The respondents also faced some problems in using social media. They faced problems of bandwidth of internet and electricity break down/ load shedding.

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Keywords: Social Media, Internet, Academic Collaboration, Face Book, Virtual Community

1. Introduction

The prevalence of internet and its usage in higher education has revamped the scenario the world over. Presently, the advancements in its capabilities have opened up new avenues of interactions for sharing of knowledge and experiences. The innovative usage has generated new opportunities of sharing academic experiences, and research practices of the eminent scholars of the world. It appears to be reshaping the instruction and instructional interactions. Internet has promoted virtual interactions for sharing research findings. Such internet enhanced interactions for communication are termed as social media. It is an internet led technology used for promotion of social interaction

* Corresponding author. Tel.: 0092-300-680-5998.
E-mail address: Irshad.hussain@iub.edu.pk, Irshad_iub@yahoo.com
among the user community. Social media is used for enhancing communication by using media tools and internet sites termed social networking sites.

The social networking sites have audio and visual capabilities consisting of web-blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, media sharing spaces, RSS Feeds, micro-blogging sites, face-book, LinkedIn having capabilities to promote synchronous or asynchronous interactions and communication (Armstrong & Franklin, 2008).

Apparently, there appears an enhanced trend among users to embrace the above social media sites particularly at university level. It seems to have changed communication patterns even at local level. The advocates of social including Palen (2008); Palen, Vieweg, Liu, & Hughes (2007) asserted that social media “…can provide [new] ways for people to interact both within and outside the spatial bounds of the event” (p.468). Some international events have proved the above assertion that social media can form opinion and bring about social change. These events along others include London Riots (2011), change of Libyan and Egyptian Rule (2011) etc. Palen, Vieweg, Liu, & Hughes (2007) further stated that media particularly social media is used as a tool for publicizing information and enhancing access of masses to it at the right time. The example of WikiLeaks can best be understood which publicized the critical and secret information to common people that otherwise seemed impossible to access.

The trend of using social media among university students seems to be increasing day by day and a large number of them is relying on its usage for interactions and communication. Seemingly, the number of students particularly at higher education level is using social media forgetting about their physical, mental and psychological health. Nevertheless, country profile and availability of the infrastructure play a crucial role in its enhanced usage. Smith, Smith, Sherman, Goodwin, Crothers, Billot, & et al (2009) worked on Second World Internet Project New Zealand Survey. The project survey revealed that 83% of New Zealand citizens used internet; out of which 80% used it for communication on daily basis, 33% instant messaging, 25% played online games at least once a week and 50% reported to be the members of social networking sites.

2. Social Media for Academic Purpose

Apparently, social media is being used increasingly by university students. It is promoting virtual communities and virtual learning environments (VLEs) for expanding (Hussain, 2005) distributed learning among users. The students interact in their virtual communities freely with members of the community. They can share information and study experiences, research projects and job opportunities with each other. Various factors contribute towards the use of social media for educational purposes. Armstrong & Franklin (2008) compiled a comprehensive report 2008. The report indicated that the students used social media in different manners to enhancing and strengthening their learning, through reflection and collaborative activities in virtual environments. However, they depended upon infrastructure including and the skill of using social media.

Now a days, the ever increasing use of social media at higher education level seems to be transforming the prediction of Armstrong & Franklin (2008) that “Universities will lose their privileged role as a primary producer of knowledge, and gatekeeper to it, as knowledge becomes more widely accessible through other sources and is produced by more people in more ways” (p.27) into reality.

The usage of social media by university students is an interesting area of research for educationists and social scientists. Hamid, Chang, & Kurnia (2009) were of the view that the available literature contains beneficial designs and styles of using it at university level. It describes the creation of contents and less focus on how to share, interact, and collaborate and socialize by its use. There seem different
reasons to justify the usage of social media in higher education. It usage was affirmed by upholding the stance that it is used to enhance study experiences of students by provision of e-support services to them (Dabner, 2011). It is used to facilitate communication among and between students in virtual communities. Amongst others, the Facebook appears to be the most favourite was suggested as a means of communication for interacting with students (Mack, Behler, Roberts, & Rimland, 2007).

The present time is regarded to be the information age providing open access to all. The younger generation called Net-Generation appears to be much inclined towards having information by using modern technologies. Educational usage of social media seems useful for all levels of education but university students are much crazy to use it (Davis, Dabner, Mackey, Morrow, Astall, Cowan, & et al., 2011).

Social media can be said to be the communication facilitator and students wish their institutions to use social networking sites for strengthening classroom (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010) instruction. In this regard Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley (2009) stated that they lead to use social media to enhance educational access and interaction. Moreover, social networking can fill the learning gap informally between “digital native” students and “digital immigrant” faculty (Bull, Thompson, Searson, Garofalo, Park, Young,, & Lee, 2008).

3. Social Media –Challenges and Issues
The user community seems to be facing some challenges and issues because of the social media. These issues were reported by students (Olson, Clough, & Penning, 2009) and social media policy makers (Grimmelmann, 2009) at higher education level including moral and social concerns. The study of Cain, Scott, & Akers (2009) affirmed the enhanced usage of Facebook by pharmacy students with low understanding of the issues related with e-professionalism and accountability.

A common disagreement appeared among faculty and students over the use social media. According to a face-book survey (2006) one third of the students were not in favour that their faculty should be present on Facebook at all. The qualitative study conducted by Selwyn (2009) on United Kingdoms’ University students using Facebook reported that they used Facebook for criticizing learning, exchanging information, extending moral support and, paradoxically, promoting themselves to be academically disengaged or incompetent.

4. Objectives of the Study
The researcher conducted present study conducted with the objectives to
a). examine the trend of using social media among university students,
b). evaluate reasons behind using social media, and
c). identify the problems of university students in using social media.

5. Research Methodology
The study was conducted with the main focus on evaluating the trend of university students to using social media. The researcher adopted survey approach for data collection. The population of the study consisted of students of the Faculty of Education of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. For data collection one research tool-Questionnaire was developed to elicit the opinions of the respondents. The researcher validated the research tool through its pilot testing on 50 students of the department of education. The finalized research tool was administered through volunteer participation of the respondents. Convenient sampling technique was adopted to administer the research tool (questionnaire) on 600 students. The response rate was 89.70% (as 538 responses complete in all respects were received).
The data were coded and analyzed through Ms-Excel in terms of percentage and presented in tabular cum graphical form.

5.1. Data Analysis and Findings of the Study

The data collected through questionnaire was analyzed through MS-Excel Programme and the results are presented in tabular cum graphical form.

Figure-1: Types of Social Media used by University Students

Figure-1 reflects the preference of students to use different types of social media. According to the figure 90% of the university students preferred to use Facebook, and 53% LinkedIn, whereas used 25% twitter, and 26% had their own web-blog; however, 64% joined Google Groups for their academic and social purpose.

Figure 2: Frequency of using Social Media by University Students

|               | Daily | Weekly | Fortnightly | Monthly | After Two Months | Occasionally | Never |
|---------------|-------|--------|-------------|---------|------------------|-------------|-------|
| Facebook      | 82    | 12     | 3           | 1       | 0                | 2           | 0     |
| LinkedIn      | 66    | 21     | 8           | 2       | 0                | 3           | 0     |
| Twitter       | 71    | 18     | 6           | 2       | 1                | 2           | 0     |
| Web-Blog      | 64    | 23     | 11          | 2       | 0                | 0           | 0     |
| Google Group  | 74    | 13     | 9           | 4       | 4                | 0           | 0     |
| Average       | 71.4  | 17.4   | 7.4         | 2.2     | 0.3              | 1.8         | 0.0   |
Similarly, Figure 2 indicates the frequency of using social media by university students. The data indicated that 71.4% of the students used social media websites on daily basis, 17.4% did so weekly whereas 7.4% logged in fortnightly. However, rest of the respondents appeared to be casual in using social media as 2.2% used it on monthly basis, 1.8 occasionally and only 0.3% reminded to use after two months.

However, Figure 3 indicates the reasons of using social media by university students. According to the data 92% of the users community used social media for getting enjoyment and 73% used it for searching and making friends. However, there was academic use of social media as 76% of them affirmed that they used such media for sharing their learning experiences and research findings, 59% shared academic events over the media, 92% used for getting latest information related with their studies, educational developments/ opportunities and current affairs. Likewise, 87% of the users were of the view that they used it for academic networking at national and international level. But there was another category of the users without any academic or social purpose and such 80% used social media for killing the time.
Figure-4 shows the problems which were reported by the users of social media websites. The respondents asserted that they faced problems of electricity failure (93%). Low bandwidth of the internet (77%), lack of infrastructure like computers and laptops (72%), managing time for using social media (89%) during the semester, leakage of privacy (65%) to their co-learners, cyber bullying (29%) as they received some unwanted messages/pictures and (68%) reported their physical problems like backache, fingers’ joint pain, dry face and blurred vision due to longer use of computer.

6. Conclusion of the Study
The study revealed that university students preferred Facebook as it is most popular media. The trend indicated that they used social media to enjoy, and friendship. However, they preferred to share their study experiences & research projects, educational events, information, and developing networks. They faced some problems like electricity failure, low bandwidth of the internet, lack of infrastructure and using social media during the semester, leakage of privacy, and physical problems.

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