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Influence of Social Media on Masters Students Learning Activities

By

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Abstract

This study uncovers the influence of social media on Masters' Students learning activities. The research intends to find out how often Masters' Students use social network sites and the social network site most commonly used. The study also discovered what social network site best supports student academic task and who students interact with over these network sites. An online survey was sent through email and Facebook to Masters Students in some Universities in England. The survey questions contained four questions. However the results of survey showed that a high percentage of students were neutral as to social network site improving their academic performance. A high percentage of students showed that network sites aid distribution of articles and files relevant to course work. The kind of problems that were solved over these network sites included Assignments, research works and general knowledge. Finding out people students interact with over these sites, results showed a high percentage of interaction between class mates and other friends. Although there are some limitations to this study, it is recommended that universities encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among mentors, tutors, course mates and others using social network sites.

Keywords: Social Media, Master's students, Social network sites, Learning, Technology

Introduction

Technology is currently advancing and changing the world, one of the technologies fastest advancement over the decade is the internet, bringing about the revolution of social network sites. Some of the most popular online destination in recent years is the social network (ComScore, 2007a, 2007b cited in (Hargittai, 2007). In these modern days, the use of internet in learning is increasingly growing and like every other emerging technology, the use of internet by students in learning has controversial issues. Some authors are of the opinion that social networking sites in learning distracts students (Zaidieh, 2012), others argue that they are

good learning medium Jones, 2002; Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Boateng and Amankwaa 2016 defined Social media as the wide collection of Internet based and mobile services that connect people together to communicate, participate, collaboratively interact, discuss and exchange ideas and information on an online community. The social networking sites which are propagated through the internet are widely becoming a means of communication in learning. The social networks sites are used to overcome the great distance and time consuming efforts in knowledge sharing. The social network which has become one of the most popular means of communication is a form of communication technology used for public and academic use. Such as social interaction within an online framework that can help university students share experiences and collaborate on relevant topics. As such, social networks can act as a method and practice of teaching (Liccardi et al., 2007). As defined by Ellison 2007, social networks are communication technology channels used for public and academic purposes; they are associated with various technological affordances within a bounded system which supports a wide range discipline, interests and practices. Social networks were initially not developed for learning purposes; they were mostly used for recreational activities. The effective, flexible and ease of use of social networks have made it a good communication tool, which if used wisely can be used for educational purposes. The use of social network is facilitated by the internet (web 2.0 technologies) placing learners to carry out learning activities by creating and sharing knowledge and experience. The advent of web 2.0 has encouraged people engagement in a technology based informal learning thereby making learning more flexible (Boyd and Ellison 2007).

Social media networks are mobile and web based applications enabling communication within and outside cooperate environments. Existing information or new information created and shared over a digital environment in context of text, video, file documents and many others.

The common social networks used by students are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Hi5, MySpace and many others. Social network site provides opportunity for students to share created content and gives access to wider audiences. The use of web 2.0 technology has changed our way of interacting with knowledge. Instead of broadcasting knowledge, individuals can make meanings out of information which increases learning. The use of social sites has made lots of individuals to create better meanings out of what is happening around them rather than by just mere daily broadcast. During the world innovation summit for education, Dan Sutch drew out some points of how social network has improved education, the few points he made was that there is a shift from supply led education to demand led education

meaning there is possibility for people coming together through social networks to create more appropriate learning. Social networks are easily accessible, portable, and enable free expression of speech and feelings. Learning can be achieved informally and at leisure times on blog and forums over social network sites. Educational networks can be created via social networks to discuss learning giving better understanding of knowledge. Although social network sites has it positive sides, there are also challenges user face over these networks, the common challenges associated with social networking sites includes issues with privacy, security and cyber bullying (Griffith & Liyanage, 2008)

This study focuses primarily on the social networks used by masters' students, how much time is spent over the social networks, individuals they have interacted with over the network, the challenges they have faced using this network and to find out if social network has improved their academic performance.

Objectives of the study

The study conducted at Manchester, North West of England is guided by the following objectives

(I)   To determine how often social network is used by masters' students.
(II)   To determine what social network site is commonly used
(III)   To determine what social network sites best supports students' academic task.
(IV)   To investigate who masters' students interact with over social network sites.

Research Questions

The four research questions are as follows:

(I)   How often is social network used by masters' students?
(II)   What social network sites is commonly used by masters students?
(III)   What social network sites best supports academic task?
(IV)   Who do students interact with over social network sites?

Methodology

Quantitative survey was used to quantify data and generalize results from a sample of the population. The technique of data collection was structured online questionnaires. Sampling was used because of its advantage of lower cost and faster collection of data. The respondents

were also randomly selected. The purpose of this study is to investigate how masters' students use internet to support learning by finding out how often they visit social network sites, who they interact with and how it has improved their educational performance. According to Saunders (2009), quantitative research involves statistical analysis of collected data and emphasises on the measurement relationship and how they can be analysed.

Method of Data Collection

Primary and Secondary data were used in the process of this study. Secondary data was obtained from previous literature found in textbooks, Articles, Journals and Internet materials while the primary data was obtained from raw data generated from the questionnaire. The technique used for data collection was questionnaire.

The study adopted a quantitative (closed response questionnaire) data collection method distributed over the internet by sending the hyperlink through email and Facebook. By using internet-based questionnaire for data collection from a large portion of masters' students, the researcher was able to collect information quickly and inexpensively. The responses were also gathered in a standardised way about people's opinions and beliefs. The use of online questionnaire can allow access to groups or individuals who will find it difficult having access to the questionnaire (Bachmann, Elfrink, & Vazzana, 1996; Wellman, 1997; Wright, 2005). Online questionnaire also saves time and allow questionnaires to reach different destinations despite being separated by geographical distances (Wright, 2005; Yun & Trumbo, 2000). Also, the use of online questionnaire eliminates paper use, reduces postage, printing and data entry therefore reducing cost (Ilieva, Baron, & Healey, 2002; Wright, 2005).

Population

The study population were masters' students in Manchester, North West of England. All participants use social network sites. Fifty eight masters' students in Manchester United Kingdom participated in the survey. All participants of the study were contacted through university Facebook groups and asked to participate voluntary in the study through Facebook and email.

A questionnaire was developed containing 4 questions, yes/no and closed response. Question one was asked to provide if the respondents are masters' students and other questions was about social network and academic performance (hours spent on social network sites), network sites that mostly support their academic work and mostly used, how social network has improved

academic work and who they chat with over these networks discussing their academic work. The questionnaire was designed to ensure that it is well communicated and easily understood by the participants in other for them to respond accurately. The questionnaire was designed to meet the aims and objectives of the study.

Procedure

10 percent of the estimated target population of 600 masters student was used. Participants were asked to voluntarily respond to the survey by sending email and through Facebook message.

Data analysis

In the quantitative data analysis, percentages were analysed via a statistical package. The questionnaire was given to only students because the survey is about masters' students and it was given randomly to students. Analysis of data focused on the four objectives addressed in the survey questions. Students perceived challenges on learning through social network. Social networks used frequently, groups they chat with over social network and their perception of social network aiding academic success. Organisation and analysis of the questionnaire data were completed using statistical analysis. The researcher grouped the analysed data to identify the general themes and patterns which is going to be compiled according to research question.

Results

Results indicate several trends of the research questions will be used to organise the presentation of Data. A total of 70 questionnaires were sent out for the survey, 59 responses were received. The results of the questionnaires returned showed that 98.3% of respondents were Masters Students with only 1.7% PhD Students.

How often do Masters Students use social networking site?

Results of the survey showed that majority of the participants use social networking sites frequently. A few percentages of the participants use social networking sites for more than 10 hours in a day. The figure returned showed that (55.9%) of the participants use social networking on an average of 1-5 hours daily, (16.9%) use social networking sites on an average of 5-10 hours daily while (11.9%) use social networking on an average of less than one hour per day. 15.3% use social networking sites for more than 10 hours per day. (See table 1 below). These figures suggest a high participation in social networks amongst master students. The figures however do not justify the reason for the use of social network by these students but

merely suggest that a good number of master's students are actively involved in the use of social networks. The study aims to find out the how masters students use social networks for learning. Further to this, other research questions will be analysed.

Table 1: Frequency of Masters Students use of social networking sites

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-5 hours per day	33	55.9	55.9	55.9
	5-10 hours per day	10	16.9	16.9	72.9
	Less than one hour per day	7	11.9	11.9	84.7
	More than 10 hours per day	9	15.3	15.3	100
	Total	59	100	100	

What social network sites are mostly used?

Participants were also asked to comment on the social networking sites that they frequently visit and and a varying response was received. The majority of the respondent used the four most common social networking sites namely facebook, skype, youtube, linkedIn and twitter. (13.6%) of the respondent mostly use facebook, skype, youtube and linkedIn. (11.9%) use facebook, skype, and youtube. (8.5%) use facebook while (7%) use facebook, skype and youtube. The results show that a majority of the participants use facebook. The most percentages of social networking sites used shows facebook is the most used social networking site. It was also observed that most participants use more than one networking site regularly. Only facebook was used by (8.5%) of the respondent. None of the remaining social networking sites were used alone without the support of another social networking site. This leads to a conclusion that most masters students believe facebook alone is sufficient to meet their academic needs online while all other social networking sites require one or more social networking sites to compliment it.

Table 2: Most used social network sites

Social Network Site	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	23	21%
Skype	21	19%
YouTube	20	19%
Twitter	3	3%
Black board discussion	14	13%
Google	11	10%
LinkedIn	9	8%

	Frequency	Percent
My Space	0	0%
Blogs	5	5%
other	2	2%

Has the use of social network sites improved academic performance?

The results of the survey is inconclusive on this particular aspect. A good number of the participants agreed that social networks have helped in improving their academic performance while an equally high percentage argue the contrary. The survey results shows that (10%) strongly agreed that social networking sites have helped in improving their studies while (27%) agree that social networking sites have also improved their studies. (39%) of the participants were neutral while (24%) disagree that social networking sites have helped to improve their academic performance. In general the results shows that a total of (37%) of the respondent believe that social networking sites have helped to improve their academic performance while (39%) were not sure if social networking sites have helped to improve their performance. From the result, we can not fully accept the assertion that social networking sites have helped in improving academic performance giving the low difference between the positive and negative difference. The high percentage of neutral responses suggest that more data needs to be collected to be able to come to a fully acceptable conclusion that social networks have helped improve the studies of students in masters programmes.

Table 3: Social networking sites have improved my academic performance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Agree	16	27.1	27.1	27.1
	Disagree	10	16.9	16.9	44.1
Valid	Neutral	23	39	39	83.1
	Strongly agree	6	10.2	10.2	93.2
	Strongly disagree	4	6.8	6.8	100
	Total	59	100	100	

Who do Masters Students interact with over social networks?

Participants were also asked who they mostly interact with on social networks. (18.6%) of the respondent were of the opinion that they interacted more with their classmates and other people from different universities and people they chat with over discussion forums and blogs. This is

a significant result of this study because it is expected that more of the communication done among masters student should be mostly with external contacts than internal contacts because the major rationale behind the application of social networks in education is to extend the reach and extent to which ideas and academic collaboration cover. The result further showed that (10.2%) of the participants interacted with their classmates and other friends in the same university offering a different course. 23.7% claimed they interacted only with their class mates on social networking sites while (11.9%) interacted with their class mates and other colleagues from the same university. (8.5%) interacted with people they do not know but who help in forums. The overall result of the students interacted with over social networking sites follows an expected trend in the use of internet and social networking sites today. Majority of the respondent interacted with their classmates and friends from the same or different university. Only a few interacted with people they do not know via forums. The issue of confidentiality and privacy played a major role in the way masters students interact across this social networking sites. The fear of social engineering which results from sharing too much personal information across social networking sites had a significant influence on the way masters students interacted across the various social networking sites. Having such a high percentage of masters students restricting any form of social networking interaction to their classmates and friends from same or different university indicates that trust across social networking sites is not easily achievable. The fear of falling victims to imposters is the reason for this observable trend. Another conclusion that can be drawn from the statistics is that masters students believed they can gain more support from their classmates or friends in same programme than from some stranger they meet across these social networking sites. This assertion is further supported by the figures that represent the percentage of students that participate in forums. (8.5%) particpate in forums with people they do not know. This low percentage of students that particpate in such forums further strengthens the claim that masters students prefer to interact with their classmates as opposed to total strangers as they believe they stand to benefit more academically from this pair interaction and this group is madeup of people whose identities they can confirm. The summary of the responses give us a good understanding of the values masters students place on each other and their other friends when it comes to social networking.

Table 4: Who Masters Student interact with on social network sites when working on academic task

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Classmates	14	23.7	23.7	23.7
	Classmates ;Other friends and contacts in the same university but not on the same course	7	11.9	11.9	35.6
	Classmates ;Other friends and contacts in the same university but not on the same course ;Other friends and contacts not in the same university	6	10.2	10.2	45.8
	Classmates ;Other friends and contacts in the same university but not on the same course ;Other friends and contacts not in the same university ;People I do not know but who help in forums	6	10.2	10.2	55.9
	Classmates ;Other friends and contacts not in the same university	11	18.6	18.6	74.6
	Classmates ;Other friends and contacts not in the same university ;People I do not know but who help in forums	1	1.7	1.7	76.3
	Classmates; People I do not know but who help in forums	3	5.1	5.1	81.4
	None of the above	2	3.4	3.4	84.7
	Other friends and contacts in the same university but not on the same course	2	3.4	3.4	88.1
	Other friends and contacts in the same university but not on the same course ;Other friends and contacts not in the same university	1	1.7	1.7	89.8
	Other friends and contacts not in the same university	1	1.7	1.7	91.5
	People I do not know but who help in forums	5	8.5	8.5	100
	Total	59	100	100	

Discussion

The study found the mostly used social networks by masters students. This was to enable the researcher find out what social learning network is mostly used by masters students. Facebook,

YouTube, Skype and Black board discussion forum had the highest frequency of use. From the results obtained the number of hours students invested in social networks daily, is clear that a good amount of time is spent over network sites. With the amount of time spent on network sites it can be an effective channel of learning for students. Network sites are effective mediums of collaboration and communication encouraging team work irrespective of the geographical distance. It is therefore clear that if network sites are explored sensibly it would be a promising learning medium. Although respondents stated that the increase of knowledge sharing through easy sharing of links of reference material and articles, a large number of respondents are indecisive about social network being a good learning platform. This is probably because social networks are used to discuss social issues possibly not related to academic work. Participants of the study agreed communication takes place with people not physically known over these networks meaning if there is a more defined social network for professionals learning can take place without having to get students distracted by any non-academic issues.

Authors have claimed that through the use of social network sites, collaboration amongst students is sure; the question is how this collaboration supports students' academic work and what forms of social networks are used. The findings from the survey indicates that Collaboration over social networks takes place between individuals familiar with one another rather than communicating with unknown individuals all over the world while seeking information. Taking Facebook as an example, findings from this study shows Facebook is the most used networking site among Masters' Students. Facebook users communicate mostly with either existing friend, class mates or someone they have met socially (Ellison, 2007). It is clear that most of the contacts on social networks like Facebook are people users know offline. Learning here is therefore limited to just the people on user's contacts. A high percentage of this contact may not add any value to academics as they might not have common academic qualifications. From the results of this finding, only 8.5% of people interact with unfamiliar people.

This study suggests encouraging students to participate more on professional networks where information flow is defined as strictly academic or professional rather than Facebook. Although some authors have suggested the creation of library groups on Facebook (Mathews, 2006). This is not enough as Facebook is full of activities that are not of any importance to academics. Also before user access the academic group on Facebook, the profile must be logged into causing a lot of distraction from posts unrelated to studies. For example the use of black board discussion forum is gradually becoming a popular site used by students. If this is encouraged it can be a

good learning platform for students. From the findings of this study a high percentage of students were neutral when asked if social network sites have improved their academic performance. Students were neutral about it because the most popularly used reference site (Facebook) is a platform where knowledge is shared at the same time it is seen as a form of distraction because it is not defined as strictly professional.

The essence of web 2.0 technologies/social networks is bringing different people together to interact with one another. The essence of social network is to share express ideas and opinions and also making friends. The fast and easy nature of communication and learning over social network sites makes it a good platform for learning. In as much as it is a good platform for communication, users are restricted to a particular group of people while interacting over this sites thereby not taking the full advantage of what this network sites have to offer. Having carried out a survey quite a few percentages (8.5%) of people interact with unknown people over social networks. This is so, probably because of the issue of trust. Trust implies ''some degree of uncertainty and hopefulness as to outcome (Marsh, 1999)''. It could be argued that trust in social networking sites is relatively high (HWZ and BV4, 2012), proven by the fact that most social network users have a problem sharing information especially to unknown people there is a need for further research on this issue to study factors affecting trust and how it can be minimised to gain the maximum benefit of social network sites in knowledge sharing.

Another major challenge impeding the use of social network sites in learning is the issue of distraction. Most of the common network sites such as Facebook and YouTube used by are mostly used for marketing by different products. Different topics are discussed over these network sites leading to cognitive surplus as pointed out by (Shirky, 2010; Greenhow, 2011). A way of reducing distraction is the suggestion as earlier pointed out. Introducing and creating awareness of networks consisting of professionals with same or similar academic goals. Where information obtained could be useful to support student studies and eliminating unnecessary topics springing up that have nothing to do with students learning.

CONCLUSION
This study focuses on influence of social media on masters' students learning. After studying the phenomena that are of interest in the study and transcribing the various responses of the sample population, majority of the participants use social network sites frequently. The key findings of this study focused on the people students interact with over social network sites. Findings suggested that while working on academic task, students interacts with classmates,

friends in same and different universities, only a few percentages of students interact with people who are not known. This was traced to the issue of trust over network sites. Findings also proved that academic related problems such as course works, assignments and research works are solved over networking site. The study revealed the higher percentage of students were indecisive as to whether or not social network sites support there academics even though social network sites enables sharing of reference material, supports research and general knowledge acquisition.

From the students opinion about the challenges of social network; it was revealed that distraction was a major challenge to learning through social network platform. This can be traced to the kind of network sites used by these students. The findings of the study showed that Facebook was the most used network by students which could be as result of marketing over these sites from different companies and also unnecessary information circulated over these sites. Similar to some author's findings those students don't always use right network sites. The study suggested students are encouraged more to use networks of professionals with similar goals for example black board extending it out of a community of known people to other professionals in the world.

Recommendation

Aligned with a research paper presented by Ansari and Khan in March 2020, it is recommended that the use social media and mobile devices presents advantages especially in terms of accessing course contents, video clips, lecture notes etc. Social networking sites makes it easy for masters' students to collaborate and interact online with their mentors and course mates at affordable rates. It is therefore suggested that social network sites use be encouraged by universities for collaboration and knowledge sharing among peers, course mates', mentors, tutors and for research purposes.

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