
SOCIAL MEDIA AS A LEARNING TOOL AMONG ONLINE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Social media seems to become a necessity and an integral part of our daily lives. While social media continues to evolve, its definitions, functions and uses change and expand from being an online platform for socialization to a potentially powerful tool for learning. In an open and distance learning institution where students and teachers have limited ways to personally interact with each other, keeping abreast with trends and technological advances to enhance learning experiences is a necessity. In order to realise the full potentials of social media, it is important know what, how and why students are using the social media tools. This study aimed to determine the online learners' motivations, perceptions, attitude and intent towards the use of social media as a learning tool. This paper is a descriptive study using qualitative data. Data on perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude and intent towards the use of social media were calculated for frequency and percentage and analysed quantitatively for means. The findings of the study revealed that in general, most of the online learners preferred using YouTube, Facebook, Google+ and Wordpress/Joomla as learning tools. Most of the students noted that they used social media because they want to stay in touch with family and friends and because other people are already into it. Results also showed that online learners have high level of agreement in terms of social media's usefulness and ease of use. Most of the respondents also like the idea of using the social media as a learning tool and will recommend the use of it.

Keywords : *social media, online learners, learning tool, Technology Acceptance Model*

INTRODUCTION

In this age where it has become quite common for people to engage socially online, it seems being online dictates how other people see our existence. It is as if we don't exist if we are not in the social media. Some industry gurus claim that if you don't participate in social media, "you are not part of the cyberspace anymore" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) defined social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user". According to statistics gathered at the start of this year by a global marketing agency, We Are Social, there are about 2.8 billion active social media users in the world, a 25% increase or an addition of about 480 million users from last year. Social media continues to evolve, and its definitions, functions and uses change and expand as well. Social media has revolutionized the way tools are used to deliver education in today's extremely technology savvy learners. The role of social media has dramatically changed from being an online platform for socialization and recreation to a potentially powerful tool for learning.

Lepi (2012) identified some ways in which teachers can integrate social media as a learning tool. Facebook can be used to a) improve communication by allowing students to easily message teachers and other students with questions; and b) schedule events, post notes and remind students of assignment due dates while Twitter can be used to post supplementary materials like links to articles and videos so students can continue learning even when class is over. Instagram is another social media platform that allows teachers and students to easily share images with each other while YouTube is a popular free video-sharing service that can be used by students as a tool for their video project presentations and for teachers to upload learning materials for their students.

In an open and distance learning (ODL) institution where keeping abreast with trends and technological advances to enhance learning experiences is a necessity, social media can be a useful learning tool. Social media networks enable online learners to define what and how they want to learn as they choose their own tools, pursue their own content, and establish social networks to help support them (Powers, Alhussain, Averbeck, & Warner, 2012). The one-dimensional way of learning is way over. Knowledge is no longer acquired in a linear manner, and there is a need to derive our competence from forming connections with other people (Mason & Rennie, 2008). Social media and the Web 2.0 tools becomes “the enablers that bring the learning community together, however it is defined by the learner, and provides the framework that allows online learners and teachers to harness the power of collaborative, personal learning” (Powers, et al., 2012). Social media not only provides educators with an opportunity to engage learners in the online classroom but also to support development of learner skills and competencies (Blaschke, 2014) and to provide an effective channel to reach out to online learners and close the generation gap (Balakrishnan, 2015). Combining the learning management system (LMS) with social media provides more student engagement, personal interaction, communication, peer-to-peer feedback, and social experience in distance education (Özmen & Atıcı, 2014).

At the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) where most classes are conducted online, recent studies were done on how social media is being used as learning tools. Marcial (2016) identified the practices of faculty members at a university in the Philippines in terms of using social media in higher education. While, Serrano & Yambao (2015) determined how students maximized social media as a venue for online collaboration.

Social media is a potentially powerful tool in education. In harnessing the full potentials of social media, knowing what, how and why students are using the social media tools is important for teachers to enable them to effectively integrate these learning tools in teaching. This study aims to address these concerns especially in the Philippine context.

FRAMEWORK

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), is one of the most frequently used models to determine the users' acceptance or rejection of a particular technology. According to Davis (1993), user acceptance is often the pivotal factor determining the success or failure of an information system project. TAM “provides an informative representation of the mechanisms by which design choices influences user acceptance, and should therefore be helpful in applied contexts for forecasting and evaluating user acceptance of information technology” (Davis, 1993). Davis (1993) also specified the causal relationships between systems design features, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude toward using and actual usage behaviour. The two important determinants that may influence the user to use a particular system are the perceived usefulness and the perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). Perceived usefulness is defined as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance”, while perceived ease-of-use is defined as “the degree

to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort" (Davis, 1989).

This study used the framework based on TAM (see Figure 1) to explore the learners' perceptions, attitude, and intent towards the use of social media as a learning tool.

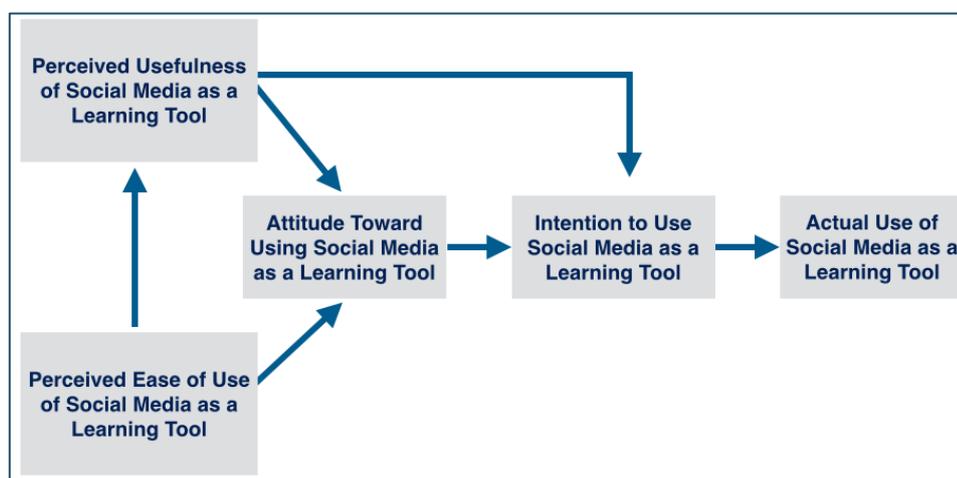


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework on the use of social media as a learning tool

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to determine the online learners' motivations, perceptions, attitude, and intent towards the use of social media as a learning tool.

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What are the social media platforms that online learners used as learning tools?
- (2) What are the online learners' reasons for using social media?
- (3) What are the online learners' perceived positive and negative qualities of social media tools?
- (4) What are the online learners' perceptions on the use of social media as a learning tool in terms of its usefulness and ease of use?
- (5) What are the online learners' attitude and intent towards the use of social media as a learning tool?

METHODS

Participants of this study are undergraduate students taking up Bachelor of Multimedia Studies (BAMS) who were enrolled during Second Trimester 2015-2016. Selected online classes that are using Facebook group as their supplementary learning management system were considered in this study. Semi-structured online questionnaires were used and a total of 71 questionnaires with complete answers were analysed in this study. Open-ended questions were used to ask students to enumerate what they thought were the good and bad qualities of social media tools and the reasons why they used the tools.

Online learners' perceptions, attitude and intent towards the use of social media as a learning tool were determined by asking respondents to rate 23 statements using Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 for "Strongly Disagree and 5 for "Strongly Agree"). Data on perceived

usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitude and intent towards the use of social media were calculated using frequency and percentage. Data were analysed quantitatively for means. Scale used were as follows: 0.00-1.00: Very Low; 1.01-2.00: Low; 2.01-3.00: Neutral; 3.01-4.00: High; 4.01-5.00: Very High.

The data collected were analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS). The Cronbach's Alpha value was used to measure the internal consistencies and reliability of the survey instrument.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Social Media Platforms Used

The social media platforms that online learners used as learning tools were determined by presenters, ten social media tools to students using a survey and they were asked to pick the platforms that they used in general and platforms they used as learning tools. Results of the study showed that in general, most of the students used Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram (see Figure 2). The use of social media platforms for learning is different. Most of the students used YouTube (81.94%), Facebook (79.17%), Google+ (33.33%), Wordpress/Joomla (26.39%) and Blogspot (25.00%) as learning tools (see Figure 2). The use of Twitter and Instagram as learning tools is not proper.

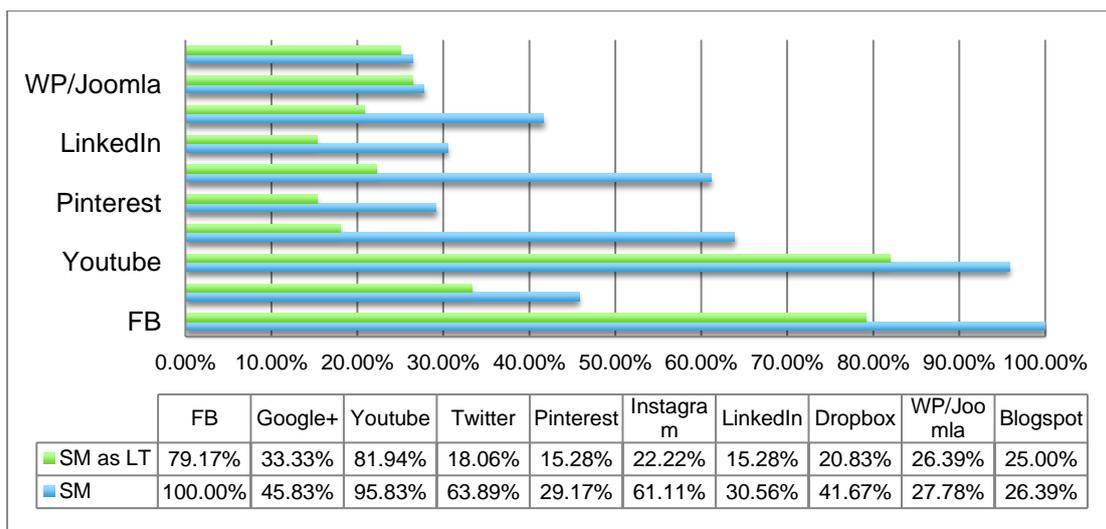


Figure 2: Online Learners' Social Media Preferences

Reasons for using Social Media

One of the most important factors on the adoption of social media is the motivation for students in using this technology. The results for the open-ended questions asking the students to determine their reasons for using the social media indicate five primary reasons. Students are motivated to use social media:

- (1) to stay in touch with family and friends
- (2) for socialization and networking
- (3) because other people are into it
- (4) because it is accessible, affordable, convenient and fast way of communication
- (5) for school-related matters

Perceived Qualities of Social Media Tools

Open-ended questions used to identify positive qualities of social media tools highlighted the following qualities:

- (1) Social media encourages easy and fast way to communicate with classmates, teachers, family, and friends.
- (2) Social media tools are convenient and easy to use.
- (3) There are wide source of information for research and news available in social media.
- (4) Since most people are into media, it is easier and faster to reach them.
- (5) Social media are great tools for collaboration and discussion with other people.
- (6) Social media can be used for contests and polls.

Meanwhile, the respondents were also asked to identify negative qualities by asking them, "What do you think are the negative qualities of Social media?". The negative qualities states are:

- (1) Social media is addictive/time consuming.
- (2) Social media is a source of distraction.
- (3) It entails privacy and security risks.
- (4) It contains unreliable information and spamming.

Perceived Usefulness

The results in Table 1 reveals that students have a high level of agreement in all the statements on the usefulness of social media, with Q9 (I think that using Social Media as a learning tool provides us with information that helps us make better decisions) as the highest. Results also showed that most of the respondents agreed that using social media as a learning tool "enables access to a lot of information" (83.30 %), "improves learning skills" (80.30 %), "is useful in their studies" (79.60 %), and "advantageous to online classes" (79.60 %).

Table 1: Perceived Usefulness

Code		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Level
Q1	I think that using Social Media as a learning tool improves learning skills.	2.80%	5.60%	11.30%	60.60%	19.70%	3.87	High
Q2	I think that using Social Media as a learning tool increases productivity in doing my course activities.	3.70%	7.40%	18.50%	61.10%	9.30%	3.65	High
Q3	I think that using Social Media as a learning tool enhances our effectiveness in doing my course exercises.	1.90%	9.30%	22.20%	53.70%	13.00%	3.67	High
Q4	I think that using Social Media as a learning tool is useful in our studies.	3.70%	5.60%	11.10%	64.80%	14.80%	3.81	High

Q5	I think that using Social Media as a learning tool raises our chances to have higher grades.	3.70%	11.10%	40.70%	25.90%	18.50%	3.44	High
Q6	I think that the advantages of using Social Media as a learning tool outweigh the disadvantages.	3.70%	11.10%	24.10%	46.30%	13.00%	3.55	High
Q7	Overall, I think that using Social Media as a learning tool is advantageous to our online classes.	1.90%	11.10%	5.60%	61.10%	18.50%	3.85	High
Q8	I think that using Social Media as a learning tool enables us to access a lot of information.	3.70%	5.60%	7.40%	50.00%	33.30%	4.04	Very High
Q9	I think that using Social Media as a learning tool provides us with information that helps us make better decisions.	1.90%	9.30%	18.50%	50.00%	20.40%	3.78	High

Perceived Ease of Use

Results depicted in Table 2 revealed that most of the respondents agreed that “learning to use the social media as a learning tool is easy” (80.30 %), “interacting with fellow learners and teachers through the Social Media is clear and understandable” (79.60 %), “it is easy to get the Social Media do what we want it to do” (77.50 %), and “Social Media is easy to use as a learning tool” (77.50 %). 25.30 % of the respondents disagree that “it is possible to use the Social Media as a learning tool without the teacher’s help”. Thus, some form of support in using social media as a learning tool is required despite the fact many students (67.50%) find it easy to use social media as learning tools.

Table 2: Perceived Ease of Use

Code	Perceived Ease of Use	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Level
Q10	I think that learning to use the Social Media as a learning tool is easy.	2.80%	7.00%	9.90%	54.90%	25.40%	3.93	High
Q11	I think that it is easy to get the Social Media do what we want it to do.	2.80%	14.10%	12.70%	53.50%	16.90%	3.68	High
Q12	I think that interacting with fellow learners and teachers through the Social Media is clear and understandable.	1.40%	9.90%	11.30%	49.30%	28.20%	3.93	High

Q13	I think that it is easy for us to become skillful at using Social Media as a learning tool.	4.20%	9.90%	12.70%	59.20%	14.10%	3.69	High
Q14	I think that it is possible to use the Social Media as a learning tool without the teacher's help.	5.60%	19.70%	19.70%	38.00%	16.90%	3.41	High
Q15	Overall, I think that Social Media is easy to use as a learning tool.	4.20%	5.60%	12.70%	59.20%	18.30%	3.82	High

Attitude and Intent of Online Learners towards the Use of Social Media as a Learning Tool

Results showed in Table 3 indicates that most respondents agreed that using the social media as a learning tool is a "good idea" (74.60 %), and a "positive idea" (73.20 %). In addition, 74.60 % of the respondents like the idea of using the social media as a learning tool. Results showed that students have high level of acceptance on using social media as a learning tool.

Table 3: Attitude of Online Learners towards Social Media as a Learning Tool

Code	Attitude towards Social Media	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Level
Q16	I think that using the Social Media as a learning tool is a good idea.	2.80%	7.00%	15.50%	57.70%	16.90%	3.79	High
Q17	I think that using the Social Media as a learning tool is a wise idea.	2.80%	12.70%	26.80%	42.30%	15.50%	3.55	High
Q18	I think that using the Social Media as a learning tool is a positive idea.	2.80%	8.50%	14.10%	57.70%	15.50%	3.76	High
Q19	I like the idea of using the Social Media as a learning tool.	2.80%	9.90%	12.70%	56.30%	18.30%	3.77	High

Result shown in Table 4 suggest that students have high level of intention on using social media as a learning tool. Most of the respondents (74.60 %) will recommend the use of social media as a learning tool.

Table 4: Online Learners' Intention to use Social Media as a Learning Tool

Code	Intent to Use	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Level
Q20	It is probable that I will use or continue using the Social Media as a learning tool.	2.80%	7.00%	15.50%	57.70%	16.90%	3.83	High

Q21	I intend to begin or continue using the Social Media as a learning tool.	2.80%	12.70%	26.80%	42.30%	15.50%	3.77	High
Q22	I will frequently use the Social Media as a learning tool in the future.	2.80%	8.50%	14.10%	57.70%	15.50%	3.76	High
Q23	I will recommend the use of Social Media as a learning tool	2.80%	9.90%	12.70%	56.30%	18.30%	3.85	High

Reliability Test using Cronbach’s Alpha

Cronbach’s alpha values for all the constructs shown in Table 5 indicates that the scales used were reliable, and have excellent internal consistency.

Table 5: Reliability Test using Cronbach’s Alpha

Constructs	Questions	Cronbach's Alpha	Internal Consistency
Perceived Usefulness	Q1-Q9	0.95	Excellent
Perceived Ease of Use	Q10-Q15	0.94	Excellent
Attitude towards Social Media	Q16-19	0.96	Excellent
Intention to Use Social	Q20-23	0.97	Excellent

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that in general, most of the online learners preferred using YouTube and Facebook as learning tools (>50%). Knowing the students’ preferences can help the teachers in determining which platform is best used. It will also help in determining which platforms are more popular and familiar among the students. Most of the students noted that they use social media because they want to stay in touch with family and friends. They also mentioned that they used social media because other people are already into it. This suggests that people have a natural tendency to look for ways to connect with other people.

Determining how students perceive the use of social media as a learning tool can serve as a guide for educators to gauge its benefits and disadvantages. Respondents agreed that using the social media as a learning tool is a “good, wise and positive idea”. They like the use of selected social media as a learning tool. Social media is able to connect people from different places in a convenient, fast and easy way and therefore it could serve as a communication tool to connect and collaborate with peers and experts for learning purposes. This study shows that most respondents agreed that using social media as a learning tool “improves learning skills”, “increases productivity in doing course activities”, “is useful in their studies”, and “provides information that helps learners make better decisions”. In addition, there is also a high level of agreement among online learners in terms of the ease of use of social media. Most of the respondents agreed that “learning to use the social media as a learning tool is easy”, “interacting with fellow learners and teachers through the social media is clear and understandable”, and social media is easy to use as a learning tool”. While, most respondents admitted that they will recommend the use of social media as a learning tool, it is important for teachers be mindful of the students’ perceived negative qualities of social media.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the motivations and perceptions of students toward the use of social media as learning tools. Result of the study aimed to contribute to research studies focusing on the use of social media as a learning tool for online courses especially in the context of open distance learning (ODL) institutions in the Philippines. This study hopes to help teachers and administrators in determining what social media platforms that are more acceptable and beneficial among students. For future studies, it is recommended to have a further investigation on other factors which can affect the motivations, perceptions, and adoption of social media among online learners such as the students' learning styles and preferences.

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