

Investigating the Use of Social Media as a Learning and Teaching Tool in Higher Education Institutions of Namibia

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Abstract: *The present generation of students entering the higher education institutions are “digital natives”, raised in a techno-centric world where present technologies play an essential role in human life and where innovations are absorbed and adopted quickly. Technology has emerged with various tools such as social media tools which have become pervasive to the extent that students and instructors in higher education use them all the time either for academic purposes or for personal use. Among these social media tools, the most popular ones are Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, YouTube, LinkedIn and WhatsApp messenger. The purpose of this study will be to investigate the use of social media as a learning and teaching tool in the higher education context of a developing African country of Namibia. The top three institutions namely the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), the University of Namibia (UNAM) and the International University of Management (IUM) will be used for this study. Secondly the study will analyse the usage trend of social media by students and lecturers in Namibia and further to that the study will investigate the social media tools suitable for conveying educational materials, and finally the research will recommend possible ways social media can be used in the Namibian higher education institutions to enhance positive learning experiences. The target population that will be selected for this study are lecturers and undergraduate students of the three higher education institutions in Namibia. The sample of the study will be 60 students and 10 lecturers from each institution. The selection will be done using the simple random sampling technique. A mixed method approach which will comprise of a well-designed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will be used as instruments for data collection in order to achieve the aims and objectives of this research. Lastly the data will be analyzed using a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).*

Keywords: social media, teaching, learning, education

1. Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT), has turned out to be one of the vital elements of the modern humanity, and thus many countries are recognizing the importance of integrating it in their core education policies (Kavi, Sheik, Asslinah, & Rajen, 2012). Most students and lecturers across the world are embracing ICTs at an unprecedented pace; social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and other sites are exploding in popularity and Google is a primary means of enquiry to many students. Indeed social networks have an incredible potential for enabling collaboration and social interactions. Many universities are turning to online education as a way of expanding offerings at a sensible cost. Most institutions offering online and hybrid programs and classes across the country have increased. Therefore harnessing this potential for learning can be a spark to ignite educational transformation in the Namibian higher education institutions.

Social media is increasingly used to support learning. Therefore many efforts have been made to integrate social media into students' overall learning environment and this has led to the emergence of E-learning 2.0, which refers to the adoption of social media in education whereby students are permitted to organize and create their own learning activities (Na, Sandy & Denis, 2012). In practice, higher education institutions are still mainly relying on traditional learning management systems (LMS) and they do not fully capitalize on the possibilities of social media for enabling

involvements in global learning networks, collaboration and social networking. Therefore the use of social media can enable students to record discussions and upload them on the platform for further information sharing, assessment, reflection and response from fellow colleagues and lecturers. Hence this contextual collaboration seamlessly incorporates communication channels, content sharing and collaboration tools into a unified user experience that permits new levels of efficiency (Geyer, Silva Filho, Brownholtz, & Redmiles, 2008).

According to Leea, Chena, Lia & Lin (2015), social media has become pervasive, and it is impacting the social fabric of people and altering the nature of social relationships. It has transformed the way in which people connect, interact and socialize. Therefore the new technologies help facilitate and also deliver flexibility in communicating and sharing of resources. This new approach to consuming information and creating it is in particular attractive to youths as a platform and space for activities that are not possible in the face-to-face environment. Yet, extreme usage of social media tools by university students has led to a dispute over whether or not it has altered the very shape and structure of students' social behavior and academic practices, and therefore it has caused leading educators to redefine how they understand interpersonal communication and study dynamics (Junco, Merson & Salter, 2010).

Most researchers have outlined the benefits or opportunities of social media as a learning tool and some think that social media is a deteriorating agent in most academics. This is

supported by research done by Klopfer, Groff & Haas (2009) who argues that most prevalent social networking sites like MySpace, Facebook, and Bebo have received intense blame from universities which are fearful for the students' online safety while using these sites, and also the anxiety that students will exploit them during instructional time. It is always important to understand the point of view of students regarding the use of social media platforms as means of enhancing their learning.

Therefore the study will investigate the use of social media as a learning and teaching tool in the three higher education institutions of Namibia. The study will assess the usage trend of social media sites by students in Namibia. It will also investigate the social media tools suitable for conveying educational materials and lastly the study will recommend possible ways social media can be used in Namibian higher education institutions in order to enhance positive learning experiences.

2. Problem Statement

Many universities in Africa and around the world embrace technology and have introduced social network sites in higher education as learning and teaching tools. This is supported by a research done by Zanamwe, Rupere, & Kufandirimbwa (2013) in a survey on the use of social networking in Zimbabwe which was conducted on Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and LinkedIn which were some of the most popular social networking sites being used in higher education institutions. However there have not been any known research on how the use social media can enhance teaching and learning in the three higher education institutions in Namibia. Therefore the study has identified the following gaps:

- Zanamwe (2013) have explored the use of social media in education but based on a pilot study conducted there hasn't been any research on the use of social media in the three higher education institutions in Namibia.
- A study by Ezekiel, Ruth & Leo (2013) explored available opportunities to be harnessed from the use of social media from their research. There is an unanswered question on whether these opportunities promote or enhance educational studies.

The purpose of this study is then to fill this research gap by investigating the use of social media as a learning and teaching tool in the three higher education institutions of Namibia.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1 The research aim

The aim of this research is to investigate the use of social media as learning and teaching tool in the higher institutions in Namibia.

The specific objectives of the research are as follows:

- 1) To assess the usage trend of social media sites by students and lecturers in Namibia
- 2) To investigate the social media tools suitable for conveying educational materials

- 3) To recommend possible ways in which social media can be used in Namibia higher education institutions to enhance positive learning and teaching experiences.

3.2 Research questions

The main research question is, "How is social media used as a learning and teaching tool in the three higher education institutions?"

The sub-questions are:

- 1) What is the usage trend of social networking sites by students and lecturers in Namibian higher education institutions?
- 2) Which social media tools are suitable for conveying educational material?
- 3) What are the possible ways social media can be used in Namibian higher institutions to enhance positive teaching and learning experiences?

4. Preliminary Literature Review

4.1 Social media as learning and teaching tool

Shih (2011) examined the use of social networking services in a hybrid learning environment. Therefore according to the findings, integrating Facebook and peer assessment can improve knowledge building, increase students' engagement and interest and raise collaborative learning. Additionally, Webb (2009) found that a variety of social media as one of the part of teaching and learning in and outside of the classroom with students resulted largely in student involvement. A study piloted by Pearson Learning Solutions (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011) found that 46% of instructors use social video and podcasts in course assignments with 20% necessitating scholars to post to social networking sites. The study also found that college faculty are most likely to use social media with more than 80% of college faculty using various form of social media in their education.

Jones and Shao (2011) clarify that although first-time students entering higher education are mainly impacted by social networking technologies, services that support the uploading, sharing and manipulation of media such as YouTube, and the use of mobile devices, students do not arrive in the university with particular demands for the usage of new technologies. They explained further that "The gap between students and their teachers is not fixed, nor is the gulf so large that it cannot be bridged" (Jones & Shao, 2011, p 1). According to their results, students rather prefer the moderate use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in their courses, viewing the use of course management systems, e-books, and online libraries positively. With respect to the use of new technologies such as blogs, wikis, and 3D virtual worlds, Jones and Shao (2011) also found that students respond to the integration of new technologies into the teaching and learning process if the technology usage is well-conceived, purposeful, and properly integrated into the learning process positively.

4.2 Social media and academic performance

According to Mehmood and Tawir (2013), the usage of technologies such as social media networks and Internet is one of the most significance factors that can impact a student's educational performance adversely or positively". Another study piloted by Roberts and Foehr (2008), in the United States regarding the students' additional activity, relatively suggested that other leisure activities are enhanced or replaced by new media such as Twitter, Facebook etc., but it does not take away the youths' time. A similar study by Negussie and Ketema (2014), conducted in Ethiopia also points out that there is no significant relationship between the times spent on social networks such as Facebook with 13 grade point average (GPA) of students. This was also consistent with a study by Ahmed and Qazi (2011) who piloted a study in Pakistan amongst six institutions of higher education. They revealed that there was not much difference between academic performance and times spent on social media networks of the students.

Various researchers have piloted research to determine the social media influence on users; for example, Moon (2011) in a study on the "impact of Facebook on undergraduate academic performance", stated that social media can have an undesirable impact on students. According to the outcome, the students' academic performance is affected by the high rate of usage of Facebook by them. In the same study by Oye (2012) states that social networking sites are used by younger students primarily for socialising activities, rather than for academic purpose.

4.3 Mobile technology in higher education

Study by Lunsford (2010) states that mobile technology has virtually infinite possibilities for networking, education and personal productivity. According to Tsinakos and Ally (2010), many higher education institutions are implementing mobile learning to provide flexibility in learning. The use of mobile devices to reach students will benefit higher education by enrolment increase and having a wider population of the students, since students in various age groups will be able to access the course materials anytime and anywhere (Lowenthal, 2010). Numerous studies have been conducted on the usage of mobile phones as learning tool and functions such as the calculator, the alarm reminder and creating messages have been reported (Ison, Hayes, Robinson & Jamieson, 2004). Particularly these studies targeted youth that is disengaged and results shows that these devices were supportive in building teacher-student relationships; thus this in turn eased improved learner engagement.

Higher education teachers in the UK have made use of SMS (short messaging service) as reminders for course requirements, pop quizzes and polling classes with some universities testing with phone exams where the user's voice print recognizes them as the test-taker. Nevertheless, there is several evidence that young people dislike this as they see the messages as an interruption (Geser, 2005). A study by Hoban (2005) reported that it has been well documented that action learning is an effective methodology for numerous teacher professional development programs but facilitator whose role is to scaffold practitioner collaborative learning

using need to support this, for example, a face-to-face combination, asynchronous communication strategies online and mobile synchronous.

4.4 Moodle as a learning and teaching platform

Moodle is a Learning Management System that is currently being utilized by students and lecturers in higher education as a learning and teaching tool in universities around the world and in the three higher education institutions in Namibia.

Researchers highly recommend using Social Networking Sites (SNS) alternative to LMS (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotoma, Robinson & Weigel, 2006; Wheeler, Yeomans & Wheeler, 2008). For instance, Chen and Bryer (2012) indicated that if SNS is properly facilitated and framed, they can benefit student learning by creating more connections across boundaries and over time. Since the primary function of the LMSs just delivers lesson content to the students, students are mainly concentrating only on the substance of the lesson topic. At this point, it is very important that the students are being distracted when they conduct their studies because in many research subjects that were conducted with them, Facebook users have demonstrated that the usage of social media may cause the student's attention to shift in different directions in most of the cases (Friedman & Friedman, 2011). That surely does not prove that the LMS does not have the functionality or interaction element. On the contrary, most of the LMS such as Moodle have the characteristics of Web 2.0 applications, especially in the most recent versions. Web 2.0 technologies are common features of SNSs and they are completely embedded into these sites. The appeal of Web 2.0 technologies makes the SNS are much trendier in all age groups of the society. These features of the SNSs make more attractive and superior to users over LMSs. Naturally, educators are heading towards to social media tools which are becoming an integral part of students' daily life in order to create an easier and more efficient learning environments for students.

5. Research Gaps Identified

The study identified a gap in the current multi-stakeholder approach of training providers, regulatory boards and labour markets which lack collaboration on skills development deliberations for individuals in the TVET environment. Therefore, the approach has not provided the desired results especially in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude of graduates which contributes to youth unemployment.

6. The Guiding Theory

Social Network Theory and Educational Change by (Daly, 2010) offers a provocative and fascinating exploration of how social networks in schools can impede or facilitate the work of education reform. This theory relates to this study as it also comprises of studies examining networks among teachers and school leaders and exploring the mechanisms by which ideas, information, and influence flow from person to person and group to group.

7. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the professional development of lecturers and students in the appropriate use of social media tools to enhance their teaching and learning capabilities and they will as well benefit and learn about the usefulness of social media in the education system. As one solution comes from another, this research will boost and persuade most universities that have social networking site to make use of it in every way possible to enhance their academic performance. Finally it will also encourage universities to integrate social media platforms as part of their virtual learning system.

8. Research Methodology

This research aims at investigating the use of social media as an educative tool, secondly to examine how students and their respective lectures are currently using social media tools for learning and teaching, to investigate their academic outcomes through the use of social media and finally to explore different social media tools that they utilize as part of their learning and teaching. Therefore the study will be conducted using mixed methods. Greene (2007) describes it as the originality of mixed methods research in creating paradoxes and conflicts which results in new information. Thus the study goal is to identify the “What” of social media using quantitative methods and the “how and the “why” using qualitative methods as suggested by Maxwell (2013).

8.1 Research design

Research design is defined as a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings (Burns & Grove, 2003). The aim of the research is to investigate the use of social media as a learning and teaching tool in the three higher education institutions. Therefore a mixed approach which comprises of semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires will be used as instruments of data collection and data will be collected from the three institutions in Namibia which are NUST, UNAM and IUM respectively and this data will be analyzed using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

8.2 Data collection

Research instruments are designed for the collection of research information/data or the purpose of the study (Mitchell & Jolley, 2008). A combination of primary and secondary data was collated from various sources and utilized in the course of the research topic under consideration. In this regard, semi-structured interviews with open ended questions and survey questionnaires will be used as instrument of data collection in order to achieve the aims and objectives of this research.

8.3 Research sample

A population is an entire group of objects from which a sample is selected and about which the researcher wishes to draw conclusions (Jackson, 2012). The study targets students and lecturers of the three institutions namely

NUST, UNAM and IUM. Heiman, (2009) stated that a sample comprises of elements of the population considered for actual inclusion in the study, or it can be viewed as a subset of measurement drawn from a population in which we study. Therefore a sample 60 undergraduate students and 10 lecturers from each university will be engaged in the study they will be selected by using a simple random sampling to form a research sample.

9. Limitations of the Study

There are various ICT tools used for teaching and learning but this study will only focus on social media tools and due to finance and time this study will not be able to cover all the participants. That is why a particular sample was chosen. Further to that, the study will be limited to students and lecturers of NUST, UNAM and IUM. It will not go further to investigate other students from different higher education institutions in Namibia.

10. Assumptions

The following assumptions are made:

- Student and lectures are using social media
- Universities will accept the use of social as a learning and teaching tool
- Social media will enhance the teaching and learning experience

11. Ethical Considerations

Before the research is carried out, the researcher will get a clearance letter from NUST, which will be taken to other universities where the research will be conducted and the researcher will also get permission from the universities where the research will be conducted in order to collect data from the target audience. All participants will be contacted and informed of the day the researcher will drop off the questionnaires. This has to be done in order to avoid deception and to ensure informed consent. This qualifies the research to be ethical considerate, because of the fact those participants have to agree on whether to participate or not. The right to privacy of respondents is also going to be taken into consideration in designing the questionnaire. Respondents have the right to choose to disclose their identity or remain anonymous. There the data has to be confidentially treated. The data will be collected for the research purpose only and the researcher will not leak the information in any other way

12. Conclusion

The proposal has provided background on pending research on the status quo use of social media in teaching and learning. It is hoped that this research will raise an awareness on the levels of adoption of social media in teaching and learning at NUST. The Social Network Theory and Educational Change will guide this research in uncovering the potential benefits and dis-benefits of adopting social media in higher education in Namibia.

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