

INFLUENCE OF NEW MEDIA ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: MERITS, PITFALLS AND PREVENTIONS

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The trends in using social media like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have gained substantial attention from the researchers across the globe. This paper outlines the findings of a qualitative inquiry using an interview procedure to address the issues that have emerged from these three themes. These themes are the positive influence of social media on university students, the negative influence of social media on university students and the role of authorities in preventing the negative influence. The participants of this study were experts from two universities. Seventy-five participants were interviewed, and their responses were analysed using NVivo. The findings suggest that social media has both positive and negative influence on university students. The positive influences of social media include sharing knowledge and information, exploring real-time multiple sources of information and engaging with multiple groups for gaining and sharing information using different modes. The negative influences include students' disengagement with the society, addiction, inconsistent beliefs. Further, the students may be easily manipulated by the fake information. However, the authorities could easily check the negative influence by imposing strict regulations.

KEYWORDS: University Students, Social Media, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Excessive use of social media by university students has provoked interest in researchers in studying a wide range of aspects related to social media and education (Aljuboori, Fashakh & Bayat, 2019). The use of social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Viber have helped university students in shaping their lives (Jehopio, Wesonga & Candia, 2017). Exponential increase and expansion of mobile technology has played a vital role in restructuring the social networks for a wide range of purposes like swift communication to sharing information (Dragon, 2016). Mobile devices have given any time access to internet and paved a way for them to dominate students' time. In fact, students use social media for many purposes. Firstly, students always feel the freedom to upload and download from social networks whatever they want and talk to whom they want. They can make new connections and discuss with them freely by commenting on their posts.

Social media helps students in creating their virtual community. It provides them the liberty to explore themselves with great freedom. Students are now available digitally on social media which was never possible almost a decade ago (Jehopio, Wesonga & Candia, 2017). Since the students can access their social networking platforms anywhere it diverts them from watching television and listening to radio. In short, the mobile technology has brought a revolution in students' lives. Researches have shown that students hook up with social networking sites for e-Learning which is increasing now as a system of social education (Aljuboori, Fashakh & Bayat, 2019). As advocated by Aljuboori, Fashakh and Bayat (2019) students use social networking sites for a range of reasons like convenience, spontaneous updates, explore and share persistently big information, creating up and keeping up unaffected social contacts and connections, continuing easy going learning and work with collaboration and correspondence.

These thought processes illuminate why social networking sites are acknowledged rapidly regardless of the way that they at first had ascended with the purpose of sharing photos and personal information (Aljuboori, Fashakh & Bayat, 2019). Since any revolution comes with its own pros and cons, mobile technology has also demonstrated its benefits and anomalies. Scholars across the globe are involved in studies on social media to figure out the attachment of students with social media and the nature and quality of activities conducted by them. In Malaysian universities too, students are deeply involved in using social media. It has influenced them to change their daily life, behaviours, community approaches and public life. It has become an immense challenge for the society to address the issue of students' dependency on social media to explore the nature of influence of social media on students

and how can any negative influence of social media be removed. This paper therefore tries to address the following concerns:

1. What are the positive influences of social media on university students in Malaysia as expressed by various expert?
2. What are the negative influences of social media on university students in Malaysia as expressed by various expert?
3. What can authorities do to check and prevent negative influence of social media on university students?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As discussed earlier, social media has brought about a revolution in the lives of university students. However, every revolution comes with its own pros and cons. In this section the various pros and cons of the usage of social media have been discussed based on the previous research studies and how it has paved the way for the present study.

The online world has improved drastically in last one decade, thanks to the creation of social media, young people share ideas, moods and audio-visual materials at a quick pace. Scholars like Yeboah and Ewur (2016) have high appreciation for the use of social media and according to them social media in terms use of Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, My Space and LinkedIn serves multiple purposes such as communication, sharing photos as well as videos. The widespread use of social networking websites has connected people globally in the last couple of years. Taking example of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp it has been observed that initially innovation happens as a hobby and then improves social standard and lifestyle for people from all over the world (Fori, 2016). Young generation in general and university students in particular have incorporated these sites as a way to connect with their peers, share material, reinvent their behaviours, and activate their social lives (Fori, 2016).

Person to person communication and communication through internet and social networking websites are two completely different platforms of sharing ideas and views. Throughout the communication using these websites, students share instant messages (IM) and chats as well as update status or do Twitter updates to communicate with the friends (Bragdon & Dowler, 2016) . They also add their opinion to the social networking websites and likewise obtain information and updates. A recent study in Iraq has stated that use of social media has more benefits than harms with regard to academic success of university students. Students increased use of social media for knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer has significantly contributed to academic

performance and educational success (Aljuboori, Fashakh & Bayat, 2019).

On the negative note the excess usage of social media by the people has diverted them from watching television and listening to radio. They have been trying to figure out the nature and quality of the activities conducted on social media (Nielsen, 2017). Since students are the largest user of social media which influences them to change their daily life, behaviour, community approach and public life, it has become an immense challenge for the society to address this issue (Nielsen, 2017). Facebook, Messenger, Imo, WhatsApp and Viber have negatively affected the lives of all age groups and in particular young groups who have become mostly maladaptive due to extreme usage (Zheng & Lee 2016). These scholars further argue that excessive browsing of social networking sites (SNS) causes an interactive addiction, material addiction and also brings behavioural disturbances in students (Zheng & Lee 2016). Extreme involvement in SNS use has been connected to a damage in psychosocial activities with losing tolerances, showing gloomy symptoms, creating problems with interactions, and compact physical movement, lack in the real-world community contribution, and decreasing academic success (Gok, 2016). Such variation in pros and cons of using social media amongst university students creates a caveat. The reason for such variation is attributed to the nature of study carried out. Most of the studies stated here are exploratory using quantitative enquiry and can't explore the reasons for such variation. It is also envisaged that these studies have only talked about cons without providing any remedy. Hence, there is a need for qualitative enquiry. Adding further to qualitative inquiry it has been observed that all of the studies mentioned above are taken from perspectives of students while ignoring other stakeholders. Hence, there is need to address the opinions and concerns of a wide range of stakeholders which has been taken into consideration in this article.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative enquiry utilizing structured interviews on stakeholders who are generally experts in the context of mass media. The study was carried out in two public universities in Malaysia. The interview protocol includes the importance of knowledge items considered relevant for a media literacy education for university students. For the purpose of standardization in the data collection process and to ensure the quality of the data gathered, all researchers were reminded to read and understand the interview protocol. This process helped all researchers to achieve inter-item reliability. The targeted sample size was about 80 respondents representing different relevant stakeholders.

The stakeholders were experts from (1) institutions of higher learning, (2) news organizations, (3) government agencies, (4) non-government agencies, (5) professional associations, (6) telecommunication and advertising companies, and (7) others which include politicians, motivators, human resource managers, and business people. A list of potential respondents for the study was created prior to the actual data collection. A letter of invitation requesting participation was emailed to the potential respondents and was followed up with calls. The duration of face-to-face interviews varied between 40 to 70 minutes. In general, the respondents took between 25 to 50 minutes to respond to the open-ended questions. During the interviews, the respondents were first explained about the purpose and significance of the study. A majority of the respondents provided verbal responses to the open-ended question and self-administered written responses to the closed-ended questions. All verbal responses were recorded and later transcribed.

A total of 75 respondents participated in the study. There were more male (64%) than female (36%) respondents. Age of the respondents ranged from 24 to 70 years with a mean of 50.7 years, indicating the respondents were experienced individuals in their respective fields. In terms of stakeholder category, more respondents were from education institutions and non-governmental organizations. There were equal number of stakeholders from the government agencies, news organizations, and professional organizations. Seeking participation of potential individuals from the news organizations and government agencies was most difficult, contrary to expectation. The percentage of respondents in the TELCO and advertising company category was small (7%). Four percent of the respondents were politicians, and the rest were opinion leaders who were motivators and business people. The profile of the stakeholders interviewed is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1**Profile of Respondents.**

	University 1 (n=36)	University 2 (n=39)	Overall (n=75)
Age (year)			
Min - Max	28-67	24-70	24-70
Mean	51.4	50.0	50.7
No response	3 (8%)	1 (3%)	4 (5%)
Gender			
Male	26 (72%)	22 (55%)	48 (64%)
Female	10 (28%)	17 (44%)	27 (36%)
Stakeholder			
Institution of Higher Learning	8 (22%)	8 (20%)	16 (22%)
News Organization	6 (17%)	3 (7%)	9 (12%)
Government Agency	2 (6%)	6 (15%)	8 (10%)
Non-governmental Organization	7 (19%)	7 (18%)	14 (19%)
Professional Association	3 (8%)	7 (18%)	10 (13%)
Telco & Advertising Company	4 (11%)	1 (2%)	5 (7%)
Politicians	2 (6%)	1 (2%)	3 (4%)
Others (e.g , Motivators, Business People)	4 (11%)	7 (18%)	10 (14%)

DATA ANALYSIS

The entire process of data analysis was carried out in various steps. First the audio taped data were transcribed. Later the data obtained in Malaysian language were translated into English and verified by the experts for accuracy in translations. The research team read through the data for each open-ended question, discussed and decided on possible emerging categories/themes. In other words, the approach taken was to identify what categories emerged from the data set rather than using a pre-established category based on the literature. The categories developed from the pre-analysis were then applied in the actual analysis of the data using NVivo. Patterns were derived from the saturation points of data that have been repeatedly addressed by the respondents. Data was triangulated using Merriam (2009) principles. Based on the patterns three themes emerged, which focussed on positive influence of mass media on university students, negative influence of mass media on university students and the role of authorities in preventing negativity.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Positive Influence of Mass Media on University Students

Mass media has positive influence on university students. Analysing across the patterns reveals that new media open platforms were mainly used for meaningful social interactions for sharing knowledge and information (e-knowledge society), explores real time multiple sources of information (real time multi sources) and engage with multiple groups for gaining and sharing information using different mode (Atomization).

Most of the respondents believe that media provides platform for knowledge sharing, opinion and thought sharing and with regular interactive socialization. Media enriches knowledge of university students and explores limitless opportunities of learning for them. The following stated quote justifies the e-knowledge society notion of new media:

“It would make the younger wiser as media provides more flexible information”.

Even though the media enhances knowledge of the university students, the respondents believe that media may have post positive and negative influence on university students. The positiveness of influence is attributed to limitless information gathered by university students, unless such information is used wisely. It is evident from the following quote:

“Media has been used positively and also negatively. The positive side of new media allows students to become knowledgeable if they used it wisely. However, when it comes to enriching a young person's mind with information and knowledge, new media provides limitless possibilities that shouldn't be ignored”.

The limitless information, fast information and information from multiple sources and ease of using technology, benefiting university students is advocated by many expert respondents (Real time multi sources).

“The Gen Y are savvier with any advancement of the ICT gadgets and they often feel at ease while using the new media rather than print and mainstream media. The speed in real time and the borderless nature of the information in the cyber world gets transfer and brings goodness to the society. Depending on the intelligence of a certain individual, the new media can be used to learn, seek or share new knowledge”.

Most of the respondents believe that because of new media like Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp etc, the socialization of university students has enhanced a lot. It is envisaged that university students use different new media platforms to interact, share information, upgrade their knowledge and even put on their critical observations before others which was not possible with old media. Confining themselves to a room, university students can interact with hundreds of their connections and in groups. Such socialization is stated as

atomization. As one of the respondents affirms that:

“There is a word in sociology called atomization. What the new media brings in is the atomization, within yourself as you are separating different things. Your Facebook is different than twitter and all this, you sectionalise yourself according to the platform you use. So, it's not really a lonely situation, you have a cross conversation. First you subdivide, then you cross them. Interesting complex relationship you built without having anyone else except yourself. Sociologically I can see it very clearly. People are said to be fractioning themselves. If you start listing the kinds of platforms people use, then you can see. The same guy will cut, and paste put it on different platform. People try to communicate the same idea through different platforms because the people in these platforms are different.”

Negative Influence of New Media on University Students

The negative influence of new media is also reported by many respondents. Analysing across the pattern reveals that with the use of new media the university students are highly disengaged with the society (Disengagement), can't live without access to new media (Addiction), don't have consistency in their beliefs (Easily manipulated) and use the information as it is without going through evidences (Fake information).

Most of the respondents have stated that university students are mostly physically disengaged with their friends due to extreme dependence on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. They seldom find time to meet their friends and share information. Their interaction is reduced to Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. Even in their classrooms, they are mostly engaged on new media and are disengaged with ongoing teaching learning process. Such disengagement is attributed to their addiction with new media. Most of the university students are online on one or other new media without any reason. They usually switch on from one media to another to post their comments which are desirable or not, forwarding the information without checking its authenticity, late night presence on social media and unnecessary debating on the issues of non-significance. Such addiction of new media has turned their attitude of positive engagement and communication to gossip mongering. Some of the respondents believe that beliefs of university students are easily manipulated by the politicians, hate mongers, as most of the students easily believe the stuff that has been posted on the new media without checking its authenticity. Hence, they equip themselves with fake information that may be highly lethal to them as well as society.

Role of Authorities in Preventing Negativity

Prevention of negative influence of new media on university students is highly advocated by the respondents. Most of the respondents believe that regulatory authorities under Government of Malaysia should be proactive enough to check the nuisance that may be created by circulation of fake news and inappropriate content that may lead to disturbance in harmony. It is stated by the majority of respondents that fake news or inappropriate contents may disturb the peace and harmony in the country and regulatory authorities should be highly proactive regarding this. It is evident from the following quote:

“Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission should exercise their authority to curb any wrong doings. Monitor the messages that might threaten the stability, peace and harmony of the nation. Control unwanted information from going viral”.

Appreciating the efforts of regulatory authorities, respondents have advocated for strict regulations and benchmarking for the standards of the contents. Following narrative supports the claims:

“Regulatory bodies should implement and enforce provisions of communication and multimedia laws. Malaysian Communications & Multimedia Commission to monitor what's “on” in the media. If anything goes wrong, they need do their job by stopping / blocking the appearance in the media and if the doer is Malaysian, then the person should be in legal trouble. Also, authorities should provide industry benchmarks on content standards and practices to all content developers and users”.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative inquiry explores a wide range of issues and concerns expressed by stake holders regarding use of social media in particular Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp by the university students in Malaysia. Using a structured interview procedure and analysing, three themes emerged out which address the issues regarding positive influence of mass media on university students, negative influence of mass media on university students and the role of authorities in preventing negative influence. The findings of this study advocate the benefits of using mass media by university students but with cautious note. It is observed that mass media has proved to be helpful in enriching knowledge of university students and exploring limitless opportunities of learning for university students. This is attributed to the use of different networking sites, internet connectivity in mobile devices and a lot of information platforms which can be simultaneously used for information gaining to sharing. This finding is in agreement with scholars like (Bragdon &

Dowler, 2016; Mouri & Arshad, 2016) who have advocated for the use of Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp for communication purpose only but has moved further with creating e-knowledge society and real time information sharing.

Besides sharing knowledge and communication, this study has come up with new idea of socialization even by sitting in isolation. The socialization here is explained in terms of connections with new people without knowing them but sharing their concerns, communication across different social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp by gaining information from any website and sharing on social networking sites and sharing of information to thousands of likeminded people in group. The negative influence of using social media that has come out of this study is in agreement with scholars (Gok, 2016; Zheng & Lee, 2016) that have addressed the issue of addiction. Most of the respondents of this study have discussed about addiction of using social media. However, this study has shown certain new aspects like disengagement of students during ongoing class, involvement as gossip mongers, victimization of political hatred and gainers of false information. The eagerness of sharing information without checking its authenticity, unnecessarily debating on the issues which are vague and equipping self with false information is stated as lethal for students and society. Though every coin has two sides positive and negative, the respondents of this study believe that negative aspects of the use of social media can be prevented by governmental authorities.

Most of the respondents have stressed that regulatory authorities under Government of Malaysia should be proactive enough to check the nuisance that may be created by circulation of fake news and inappropriate contents that may lead to disturbance in harmony, strict regulations and regulations through benchmarking the standards of the contents. They have advocated for strict laws and actions against all who are involved in developing, sharing and making viral all negative activities, views, fake news and spreading hatred. They have also suggested that authorities should benchmark certain standards for use of social media. Since it's a qualitative study which can't be generalized, it is recommended to conduct mixed method and 360-degree study to explain and explore all the issues that can be generalized in the Malaysian context.

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