



Social Media for Informal Learning Usage in Malaysia: Barriers and Benefits

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Abstract. Social media (SM) tools have turned into a vital aspect of our day to day activities. As of late, this form of media has garnered a large set of users. There is perceived usefulness on the effect of SM on certain aspect of scholarly activities. However, it is still not clear why some researchers fail to adopt SM for informal learning (IL). The aim of this study is to investigate the barriers and benefits of using SM for IL among Malaysian academic researchers. A total of 170 responses were received through paper-based and online-based questionnaire. To demonstrate the results in this study, a descriptive interpretation of the responses is conducted. The general discovery of this study indicates that lack of encouragement from colleagues, lack of quality information, threat to research materials and data are the barriers affecting SM usage among academic researcher in Malaysia. Additionally, the core benefits of using SM among academic researchers in Malaysia is to communicate with colleagues, share knowledge with other researchers and to also collaborate in the research field.

Keywords: Academic researcher · Social media · Informal learning
Formal learning · Barriers · Benefits

1 Introduction

Recently, the evolution of SM such as Facebook and YouTube has led some academic researchers to consider its use in certain scholarly activities. Facebook as social networking sites (SNSs) provides a stage for academic researchers to collaborate and interact. YouTube is also SNSs that provides a stage for scholars and other users to share multimedia works, update their knowledge. The overwhelming popularity of these SNSs has resulted in their adoption into the academic environment [1–5]. Facebook is founded in 2004 with one million users and now burst of more than 2 billion users [6]. Also, YouTube was founded in 2005 with 8 million users every day and now it burst of more than 1,32 billion subscribers in 2018 [7]. Nevertheless, the low rate of SM adoption for IL calls for investigation [8, 9].

This study empirically examines the barriers and benefits of using SM for IL in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) which is one of the foremost research

universities in Malaysia. [10] Affirms that research universities are highly valuable in developing nations for them to effectively compete in the knowledge economy. As indicated by [11], innovations that make it easy to transfer knowledge and maximize collaboration among researchers play a major role in research growth and productivity. Researchers have shown that, university productivity in research ultimately result in favorable ranking among other universities [12, 13]. Undoubtedly, high level productivity among researchers always boils down to efficient collaboration and interaction. Hence, the ability of scholars is highly influenced by creating a collaborative atmosphere [14]. Thus, the usage of SM as a communication, interaction and collaboration tool would effectively improve research productivity which will in turn result in favorable ranking among other universities. The aim of this study is to identify the barriers and benefits of using SM for IL among academic research in Malaysia. The main objectives of this study are:

- I. To find out the barriers affecting the use of SM for IL by academic researchers.
- II. To find out the benefits of using SM for IL by academic researchers.

The paper is structured as follows: a brief review of the literature is presented in Sect. 2, followed by the research methodology in Sect. 3. The research findings are presented in Sect. 4. Section 5 concludes the paper and recommends some future research.

2 Literature Review

Very few studies have investigated the use of SM for IL [15]. This section present previous studies on SM for IL indicating their limitations. SNSs such as Facebook, has transform the Internet into a social environment which eventually encourage learners' to learn informally and disseminate information effectively [16]. The adoption of SNSs in the educational environment is not something new. An increasing number of studies in recent years have investigated the pedagogical potential of SNSs and its effectiveness as a learning tool. With results showing a majority of participants frequently uses Facebook and YouTube for communication and collaboration [17].

[18] Conducted a survey on 711 academics to investigate how they integrate SM into their work activities. A large number of the respondents claim to use SM for their research work. The study conducted by [19] investigates why researchers use SM. 55% of the respondents indicate that they mostly use Facebook. Furthermore, [20] investigate the use of Facebook among different age groups, they found that females and younger population are frequent users. This finding is corroborated by [21] who indicate gender and age differences in the use of SM.

Recent literature by [22] provides insights on how the structure of SM varies across disciplines. The research showed that discipline plays an important role in SM usage. [8] Noticed that a large number of SM features are adopted based on disciplines. Certain literatures indicate these differences according to disciplines [4, 23–25]. As indicated by [26], there exists a large difference in SM membership rate based on disciplines.

Given the extent of literature reviewed, it can be inferred that research has mainly focused on the influence of SM rather than its barriers and benefits to the academic researchers. Hence, the ultimate goal of this study is to identify the barriers and benefits of SM among researchers in Malaysia.

3 Methodology

The present study employed a survey technique to collect data. The questionnaires comprises of twelve questions and all the questions were adapted from prior literatures [24, 26–28].

The convenience sample was employed to investigate the barriers and benefits of using SM for IL by academic researchers in Malaysia. The sample includes the academic researchers consist of Postgraduate Students, Research Fellow and Academic Staff of UTM. A total of 170 responses were collected using paper-based and online-based questionnaire. The collection process began in February, 2018 and lasted one month. The collected data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science for Windows (SPSS for Windows Version 25.0). The level of significance at probability level of 5% was used.

4 Research Findings

In this study, majority of the respondents were male (63.5%) and also 36.5% were female, indicating a good mix among the genders in an academic environment (see Table 1). A larger part of the respondents were aged between 25 to 30 years (34.7). With regards to position, 106 (62.4%) of the respondents were Postgraduate students (PhD and Master). Table 1 shows that a large part of the respondents were found not to use SM (62%, $n = 106$). Whereas, a lesser figure of the respondent (38%, $n = 64$) have experience in using SM for IL.

4.1 Barriers to Using Social Media for Informal Learning by Academic Researchers

The barriers that hinder researchers from using SM for IL were identified from the survey (see Table 2). The major barrier as indicated by the researchers was, lack of encouragement from colleagues on the need to use SM for IL (66.04%, $n = 70$), followed by lack of quality of information (59.43%, $n = 63$), threat to research materials and data (57.55%, $n = 61$), lack of necessity to use SM for IL (57.55%, $n = 61$) and finally time concerns (52.83%, $n = 56$).

4.2 Benefits to Using Social Media for Informal Learning by Academic Researchers

The evolution of SM has opened a new vista for researchers to collaborate and interact with colleagues and ultimately share resources. The benefits of SM for IL as indicated

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

	Users		Non-users		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	45	26.4%	63	37.1%	108	63.5%
Female	19	11.2%	43	25.3%	62	36.5%
<i>Age</i>						
Less than 25–30 years	19	11.2%	40	23.5%	59	34.7
31–35	14	8.2%	16	9.4%	30	17.6
36–40	13	8.8%	18	9.4%	31	18.2
41–45	11	6.5%	11	6.5%	22	12.9
More than 45	7	4.1%	21	12.4%	28	16.5
<i>Position</i>						
Academic Staff (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, Professor)	19	11.2%	33	19.4%	52	30.6%
Research Fellow	5	3%	7	4%	12	7%
Postgraduate Student	40	23.5%	66	38.9%	106	62.4%
<i>Experience as a researcher</i>						
less than 1 year	6	3.5%	14	8.2%	20	11.8
1–3 years	18	10.6%	35	20.6%	53	31.2
3–5 years	15	8.8%	25	14.7	40	23.5
5–10 years	13	7.6%	14	8.2	27	15.9
More than 10 years	12	7.1%	18	10.6	30	17.6

Table 2. Barriers associated with use of SM for IL by academic researchers

Barriers	Respondents	Percentage (%)
There is lack of encouragement from colleagues on the need to use SM for IL	70	66.04
I don't use SM for IL because most information obtained are lack of quality	63	59.43
I don't use SM for IL because it is a threat to my research materials and data	61	57.55
I don't feel any necessity to use SM for IL	61	57.55
I don't have time to use SM for IL	56	52.83

by researchers are presented in Table 3. The findings indicate that researchers need to keep up to date is the most common benefit (81.25%), followed by communicating my research with research partners (81.25%), facilitating interaction with my research partners (81.25%), communicating about my research with researchers globally (79.68%), exchanging knowledge more quickly with other researcher (78.12%), share knowledge with other researcher (75.00%), communicate with the renowned experts in

my research field (67.18%), facilitate collaboration with my researcher partners (64.06%), get feedback about my research from other researchers (60.93%), discuss my research method with other researchers (57.81%), discuss my research finding with other researchers (56.25%), facilitate collaboration with my research respondents to collect the required data (53.12%), discuss with other research in conducting literature review (51.56%), and find collaborators for my research projects (50.00%).

Table 3. Benefits of using SM for IL by academic researchers

Benefits	Respondents	Percentage (%)
I use SM to communicate with others researcher to keep up to date with the new information related to my research field	52	81.25
I use SM to communicate about my research with my research partners	52	81.25
I use SM to facilitate interaction with my research partners	52	81.25
I use SM to communicate about my research with researchers globally	51	79.68
I use SM to exchange knowledge more quickly with other researcher	50	78.12
I use SM to share knowledge with other researcher	48	75.00
I use SM to communicate with the renowned experts in my research field	43	67.18
I use SM to facilitate collaboration with my researcher partner	41	64.06
I use SM to get feedback about my research from other researchers	39	60.93
I use SM to discuss my research method with other researchers	37	57.81
I use SM to discuss my research finding with other researchers.	36	56.25
I use SM to facilitate collaboration with my research respondents to collect the required data	34	53.12
I use SM to discuss with other research in conducting literature review	33	51.56
I use SM to find collaborators for my research projects	32	50.00

Note: multiple answers are permitted (No. of user = 64)

5 Discussion

The overall findings in this research showed that a majority of the respondents do not use SM for IL. Respondents who have experienced the use of SM indicate that the most common benefit derived are: keeping up to date, communicating about research activities with other researchers, facilitation of interaction with research partners, communicate about research with researchers globally, exchange and share knowledge more quickly with other researchers. Whereas, the major barrier to the use of SM for IL

by academic researchers are: lack of encouragement from colleagues, most information obtained lack quality, threat to research materials and data, lack of any necessity to use SM for IL and time concerns. The findings in this paper will help policy makers in tackling this barriers and maximizing the identified benefits to the research community.

6 Conclusion and Limitations

The research set out to investigate the barriers and benefits of using social media for informal learning by academic researchers in Malaysia. The research identifies the major barriers that affect the adoption of social media for informal learning by academic researchers. It also present the benefits associated with using social media for informal. In conclusion policy and decision makers should help in overcoming the identified barriers in this study, and maximize the benefit inherent in social media use for informal learning by academic researchers. As this will go a long way in reducing the pressure on the limited resources in academic environments.

Though the findings of this paper are far reaching they are not devoid of limitations. Firstly, the survey was conducted in a single university (UTM), generalizing its findings to the whole population must be done with caution. The research used quantitative method; other research could consider using alternative methods as this might provide varying results.

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