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Chapter - January 2019
DOI: 10.1007/978-981-13-3338-5_2

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Use of Social Media for Improving Student Engagement at Université des Mascareignes (UDM)

Randhir Roopchund, Vani Ramesh and Vishal Jaunky

Abstract The research responds to the global trend of using technology in higher education for improving student engagement and student satisfaction. The research ontology adopted is that students may benefit from a more interactive approach of learning in classes. The methodology used is the use of a pre-designed questionnaire to test the readiness of students and faculty members for the use of social media. Three components were extracted based on EFA which are namely social media as a facilitator, improving learning proficiency and trust in data security. The research outlines the benefits, risks and challenges for adopting SNSs for improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. It is important to note that social media tools are part of the Web 2.0 interactive and intelligent system of communication being used in different fields.

Keywords Social media · Social networking sites (SNSs) Informal scholarly communication · Higher education and social learning

1 Introduction

The present research seeks to explain the importance, challenges, and problems in using social media in Mauritian Higher education. Mauritius has a high internet penetration rate of almost 70% with more than 700,000 Facebook users. This proves that people of different ages use social media in their day to day lives. Mauritius ambitions to be an education hub in future and consequently, the use of technology
for enhancing learning is of paramount importance. Recently, the launch of a social media guide by the Minister of Education heralds the importance of social media for the Mauritian youth. The research relies primarily on the opinions provided based on a survey carried out with students at Université des Mascareignes (UDM).

2 Research Problem and Research Objectives

The present research addresses the research gap of using technology in higher education in the Mauritian context. There is little research on the prospects and challenges of using social media in higher education. However, Mauritius ranks first on Internet penetration in Africa and also has the highest number of social media users if compared to the population. The research is also a logical pursuit after exploring the use of customer relationship framework in higher education in prior research. However, the research will be context specific as the questionnaire will be administered to students of Université des Mascareignes which is a Public University.

The objectives of the research are to:

1. Understand the use of social media in Higher Education
2. Analyse how social media may be used to increase student engagement at UDM
3. Develop some recommendations to improve student engagement.

2.1 Hypothesis and Research Framework

It is hypothesized that students have positive a negative attitude towards the use of social networking sites. The hypothesis can be formally stated as:

H0: Students have a negative perception about the use of Social Networking Technologies in Higher education
H1: Students have a positive attitude towards the use of social networking technologies in Higher education

3 Literature Review

3.1 Understanding Social Media

Social media refers to media used to empower social collaboration. For the present study, the term social media technology (SMT) alludes to electronic and portable applications that enable people to make, connect with, and share new user-generated or existing content, in computerized situations through multiway communication.
Social networking sites are the term utilized as a non-exclusive term for every single social medium and PC interceded correspondence, including yet not restricted to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Myspace, including social networking sites of Cyworld, Bebo and Friendster. Ellison and Boyd [1] characterize interpersonal organization locales as electronic administrations that enable people to develop profiles, show client associations, and inquiry traverse inside that rundown of associations.

### 3.2 Increasing Use of Social Media

There is an increasing use of social media in Mauritius (more than 700,000 Facebook users). From the diagram below, the most commonly used social media are Facebook followed by Pinterest and Twitter (Fig. 1).

Social media in Mauritius has witnessed tremendous growth with the rise in the number of users and their participation spent their time on Social Networking Sites. Broadband too has seen a noteworthy development in 2012 with 400 thousand clients (57%) are educated youngsters. Mauritians who have relocated to Australia, Canada, and European nations for training and career are in constant touch with family and companions which prompted the ascent in utilization of informal communities such as Facebook. This trend has expanded much more with the process of globalization triggering Mauritian to use more technology such as mobiles, PCs, other registering gadgets like PCs, tablets. Most prevalent social networking media platform in

![StatCounter Global Stats](https://www.statcounter.com/statcounter-globals.aspx)

**Fig. 1** Use of social networking sites in Mauritius
Mauritius is Facebook as around 58% dominated by male and for the most part, the students and professionals in the age group of 14–24 are using the social media.

3.3 Social Media in Higher Education

The Hon Minister of Education for Mauritius Mrs. Leela Devi Dookun-Luchoomun [13] stressed the growing importance of technology for Mauritian while highlighting its developmental role in the higher education sector. The Minister also highlighted that technology will entail the transformation of educational institutions into ICT-driven ones. The increasing use of tablets and other hi-tech materials may eventually contribute to making this dream a reality.

At an international level, some universities are already using podcasts, video blogs, and webcasts to share the work of students, faculty and alumni with the public at large. There is increasing use of Tweeting—the function of a status update (tweets)—is increasingly being used for discussion by students and faculty members [9]. Besides, numerous NCAA members have encouraged athletes, mentors and other staff to use Twitter and Facebook as platforms to connect with fans [20]. Faculty members have also used blogs as a pedagogical strategy. Some recent studies have investigated the use of blogs in academic disciplines including the sciences [4], language learning [8], teacher education [7, 16] and business [21]. Faculty has also created Facebook profiles to connect with their students in a more personable and informal space [19].

3.4 Web 2.0 and Student Engagement in Learning

The advent of Web 2.0 applications, collectively known as social media, presents schools and universities with the opportunity to go beyond traditional delivery formats and develop learner-centred personalized learning environments [18]. It has significant impact for teaching and learning because they are strictly web-based and typically free, support collaboration and interaction, enhance students’ learning experiences through customization and personalization and provide rich opportunities for networking. They are also highly responsive to the user and is highly student-centred approach [5].

3.5 Facebook and Blogs for Enhancing Student Engagement

The use of Facebook and blogs are increasingly being used in the higher education landscape [6]. Facebook is not only a network of contacts but may also be used for communication, sharing of videos and also chat. Gee [10] compares Facebook to affinity spaces where people may acquire social and communication skills. Facebook
has additionally been utilized for formal learning with academics setting up open or private gatherings for classroom practices [14]. Through the use of blogs, lecturers have the chance to make the material open for subsequent reflection and investigation thus improving the overall learning experience. Despite the growing evidence of the use of Facebook and blogs in educating and learning, there is lack of published research linking the use of these tools for improving student engagement. Studies that exist stem to a great extent from fields outside education, for example, sociology, human sciences and communication studies [3, 11]. However, existing research in the field of education demonstrates that students use social media such as Facebook and blogs on a daily basis and trust that more utilization of such advances in scholarly settings would prompt greater planning and commitment [6].

4 Research Methodology

This research design used a survey research methodology wherein a questionnaire was used as the main research tool. Questions included demographics, challenges and perceptions. The respondents were asked to rank and comment on different questions. This was used to determine the weight or the importance of each challenge and perception. The questionnaires included a combination of both structured and semi-structured questions. The questionnaire was validated by pretesting it with a few undergraduate students and making some changes to a few questions.

5 Analysis and Results

5.1 Profile of Participants

Table 1 provides the profile of participants (58 in total) in terms of year of study and also the different age groups. We find that students from Year 1 to Year 3 students participated in the survey. The highest percentage is for the final year students (more than 40%). In terms of gender participation, there were 32 as compared to 26. Most of the students are in the age bracket of 18–25 years.

5.2 Social Media Presence

Almost all students (98.3%) are on social media based on the survey results. This is not surprising due to high internet connectivity and this corresponds to the statistics of high internet users (more than 63% overall). We also have a 50% penetration rate for Facebook users. The high rate of social media presence is also explained by the
The fact that the survey has been conducted with young students who are technologically savvy. The findings corroborate with the increasing number of users as identified by the increasing internet users by global statistics. The number of Internet users in the Republic of Mauritius in the past decade has boomed. In fact, the number of internet users in the island nation has undergone a tenfolded growth. Going from 30,000 users in 1998 to 290,000 12 years later with a penetration rate of over 22% [2] (Chart 1).

From the above, we find that most of the users are from Facebook, followed by Twitter and Pinterest. This is in line with the emerging trends in teaching pedagogy such as connectivism [17]. Another learning theory which suits the teaching and learning needs of digital learners is the Communities of Practice (COPs). Piktelias and Greenes [15] define Gen-Y as a person who ‘values group and team learning, constructing understanding from many sources as opposed to a single authority’. A Community of Practice (COPs) is hence a natural fit to motivate and enhance the learning of Gen-Y. The statistics confirm the popularity of Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest as the most used social media. However, there may be a change in future with the problems and the data privacy issues being raised at the international level (Chart 2).

From the above diagram, we find that the students are very actively engaged on social media. They use social media on a daily basis and consequently, there is high scope for using it in the field of education. Almost 50 students claimed that they use social media on a daily basis.

Table 1 Profile of participants-year of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year of study</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Use of Social Media for Teaching at Université des Mascareignes

The most interesting findings from the survey are that 85% of students are of the opinion that social media may be used as a teaching tool. Social media has traditionally been used as a means of making friends, networking and not as a medium of education strategies. Minocha [14] makes reference to the use of Social media in higher education for different purposes. Out of the 85% who are in favour, they believed that Facebook may be used for communicating with students and sharing resources. However, the use of Facebook as a discussion forum and Facebook page has not been selected (Chart 3).

The findings may be compared to the study carried out by [12] where students provided the following responses to the applications of social media technologies (survey carried out with 80 students). It should be explained that the sample is higher than the present study.
How do you use SMTS to support education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No of responses</th>
<th>% of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignments/project collaboration</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>97.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of documents</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>91.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/information sharing</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>83.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities/events updates</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>80.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sourcing of information</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with professors and peers</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>87.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Social Media and Student Engagement

The following variables have been used to assess student engagement through social media in higher education. We find that the mean is more than 3 implying that students are quite engaged and active (on a scale of 5). The grand mean for all the variables is 3.35. A factor analysis has been carried out to extract three main factors that may explain student engagement through social media. The three components will be explained later.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Initial eigenvalues</th>
<th>Extraction sums of squared loadings</th>
<th>Rotation sums of squared loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>% of variance</td>
<td>Cumulative %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.447</td>
<td>41.900</td>
<td>41.900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.167</td>
<td>8.977</td>
<td>64.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>6.922</td>
<td>71.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.847</td>
<td>6.518</td>
<td>77.623</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the above factor loadings and eigen values, we find that three factors have been extracted with eigen values more than 1. The three components that were extracted have been named as follows:
5.5 Components of Social Media Engagement in Education

6 Recommendations

This study provides a positive view about the perception of students for the use of social media for improving student engagement at UDM. Most of the students are using Facebook as social media platform on a daily basis. Based on the EFA, three components have been extracted which may help to improve engagement which are namely social media as facilitator and learning and proficiency. However, students are concerned about the safety and security issues with the use of social media.

References


