Lecturers' Behaviors And Beliefs About The Use Of Social Media In Higher Education: A Study At Mahasarakham University In Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes lecturers' behaviors and beliefs regarding social media in higher education at the Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University. Thirty-one lecturers were surveyed about their attitudes toward the use of social media in their classes. Their responses were analyzed using arithmetic mean and standard deviation. The results are as follows: 1) The most frequently used social media were YouTube, Facebook, and Slideshare. 2) The lecturers believed that social media were easy to use and saved time and money for online courses; furthermore, they reported that social media could be a tool for teaching, enhancing collaborative learning, and improving project abilities.

Keywords: Lecturers' Behaviors; Social Media; Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, Flickr, Slideshare, blogs, wikis, and podcasts) are widely used in higher education. Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011) found that among the various social media sites, lecturers most frequently named YouTube and Facebook when asked about their use of social media in teaching practice. Moreover, the lecturers in their study believed that social media sites offer value in teaching. An overwhelming majority reported that they believe videos, podcasts, and wikis are valuable tools for teaching, and a majority said that social media sites can be valuable tools for collaborative learning. The lecturers also believed social media could be a valuable tool for online teaching and collaborative learning.

Learners can choose when and where they learn. They also share their ideas, exchange materials, discuss course topics, and create their own knowledge (Kultawanich, 2011; Tiryakioglu & Erzurum, 2011; Wannapiroon & Supa, 2012; Nilsook & Wannapiroon, 2012). Moreover, through the use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, and wikis, they can learn how to apply technology skills to their education and daily life. Therefore, most lecturers have adopted integrated social media in the courses they teach (Moran et al., 2011; Srichoosin & Satiman, 2012), and similarly, learners have adopted integrated social media for learning (Roblyer, 2010).

In 2012, the Thai government launched the project "One Tablet PC Per Child" with the goal of improving education by addressing inequality and uneven standards of education quality. Specifically, it was noted that some students have more opportunities to use and learn about technology than others (The Royal Thai Government, 2013). Around the same time, Mahasarakham University launched the project "Microsoft Surface for Lecturers and Learners" to support online learning. The university's Faculty of Education also specified in the Strategic Plan 2011-2020 that it aims to develop an e-learning system that will provide students easy access to online courses (Executive Board of Education, 2010). Therefore, lecturers need to design their courses to support online learning through appropriate technology.

However, lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Mahasarakham University are more familiar with traditional learning; they may not know how to use technology appropriately or integrate social media into their courses effectively. Finally, they may reject and or hesitate to use such technology as part of their course curriculum (Whattananarong, 2011). Given this background, there is a clear need to study lecturers' attitudes toward the use of social media in higher education. To this end, this study collected data on lecturers' behaviors and beliefs about social media. The research findings can help course developers and lecturers design classes that effectively integrate social media into university courses. It is hoped that this instructional model will help students achieve their learning objectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media in Higher Education

Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011) found that lecturers believe in the effectiveness of social media as a learning tool and use the technology in their courses. Almost all the lecturers they surveyed reported using social media in courses they were teaching, including both in and outside of class. For example, they posted course content for students to read outside class, required students to read or view social media as part of course assignments, and assigned students to comment on or post to social media sites. Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, and Leveritt (2012) found that social media can facilitate university learning activities.

Popular social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, Flickr, Slideshare, blogs, wikis, and podcasts) are widely used in higher education. In Moran et al.'s (2011) study, lecturers most frequently named YouTube and Facebook as the social media they use in their teaching practice. The lecturers said they believed that social media sites offer value in teaching. An overwhelming majority reported that they believed video, podcasts, and wikis are valuable tools for teaching, and a majority answered that social media sites can be valuable tools for collaborative learning. Facebook is currently considered the most popular platform for online social networking among university students. As such, it may be utilized as an online environment to facilitate English learning. To make the learning through Facebook use meaningful for students, teachers or language instructors have to integrate Facebook as an educational project with pre-determined learning objectives and outcomes (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010). Facebook was developed for four university courses, originally used to provide information relevant to the courses and allow opportunities for student interaction (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, & Leveritt, 2012). It is now potentially a valuable resource for supporting student communication and facilitating collaboration with lecturers. Therefore, students have widely adopted its use (Roblyer, 2010).

Using social media in higher education is a form of educational innovation. Lecturers need to know and learn how to use social media in their courses to help learners learn more and achieve their learning objectives.

Diffusion of Innovations

In the 21st century, society changes rapidly, and people need to update their skills to keep up with the latest technological developments and tools, especially if they are to apply technology effectively in their lives. They need to use digital technologies, communication/networking tools, and social networks appropriately to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information to successfully function in a knowledge economy. Technologies have become a tool to research, organize, evaluate, and communicate information (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011). In response, education must also change to equip learners with the appropriate skills and meet their current demands. For example, students can study from any time and from any location by using the appropriate technology. Online learning has become crucial for higher education.

Using social media is an educational innovation that is valuable for online learning in higher education. However, lecturers who are in the Faculty of Education at Mahasarakham University are more familiar with traditional learning; they may not know how to use technology appropriately or integrate social media into their courses effectively. Finally, they may reject or hesitate to use such technology as part of the course curriculum (Whattananarong, 2011). Therefore, there is a clear need to study lecturers' attitudes toward and use of social media in higher education.

Rogers (2003) presented a model of the innovation-decision process. The model comprises five stages, among which is the implementation stage. Implementation occurs when an individual (or other decision-making unit) puts an innovation to use. Until the implementation stage, the innovation-decision process has been a strictly mental exercise of thinking and deciding. However, implementation involves overt behavior, as the new idea is actually put into practice. It is one thing for an individual to decide to adopt a new idea, yet quite a different thing to put the innovation to use, as problems with exactly how to use the innovation arise in the implementation stage. Implementation usually follows the decision stage, unless it is delayed by some logistical problem, such as temporary unavailability of the innovation. The crucial variable determining the rate of adoption of innovations is their perceived attributes, which consist of five types: 1) Relative advantage, 2) Compatibility, 3) Complexity, 4) Trialability, and 5) Observability.

Tantaphalin (2010) studied the causal factors affecting the decision process to adopt blended learning by Faculty of Education instructors in Thailand. Drawing on Roger's innovation decision process theory, he found that the factors affecting knowledge in the decision phase were the characteristics of the instructors. The factors affecting the persuasion, decision, and adoption phases were the characteristics of blended learning.

The S-Shaped Curve of Adoption and Normality

Rogers (2003) explained that the time element of the diffusion process allows us to classify adopter categories and draw diffusion curves. The adoption of an innovation usually follows a normal, bell-shaped curve when plotted over time on a frequency basis. If the cumulative number of adopters is plotted, the result is an S-shaped curve.

The S-shaped adopter distribution rises slowly at first, when there are only a few adopters in each time period. The curve then accelerates to a maximum until half of the individuals in the system have adopted the innovation. Then, it increases at a gradually slower rate as fewer and fewer remaining individuals adopt the innovation. This S-shaped is normal.

The S-curve, it must be remembered, is innovation-specific and system-specific, describing the diffusion of a particular new idea among the number units of a specific system. It describes only cases of successful innovation, in which an innovation spreads to almost all of the potential adopters in a social system. However, many innovations are not successful. After being adopted by only a few people in the system, an innovation may ultimately be rejected, so that its rate of adoption levels off and, through discontinuance, decreases sharply.

Ajjan and Hartshorne (2008) investigated faculty decisions to adopt Web 2.0 technologies. Through theoretical analysis and empirical tests, they found that while some faculty members feel that Web 2.0 technologies could improve students' learning, interaction with faculty and their peers, writing abilities, and satisfaction with the course, few instructors chose to use them in the classroom. Additional results indicated that faculty members' attitudes and perceived behavioral control are strong indicators of their intention to use Web 2.0. A number of implications were drawn highlighting how the use of Web 2.0 could be useful in the classroom.

Ruangsawat (2010) studied lifestyles and behaviors of social network use by office workers in Bangkok. Most participants in the sample were members of Facebook. They typically accessed the site on their home computer between 6:01 PM and 10:00 PM. They visited it 7 days a week, for an average of 90 minutes each time. During this time, they chatted with their friends, updated their status, uploaded pictures, and found and shared data.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire survey was used to collect data on lecturers' behaviors and beliefs about the use of social media in higher education. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each item on a rating scale. The sample consisted of 31 lecturers in the Faculty of Education at Mahasarakham University. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in diffusion of innovations, five experts in online learning, and three experts in educational research and evaluation using the index of item-objective congruence (IOC). The IOC values ranged from 0.72 to 1.00. The data were scored by using arithmetic mean and standard deviation.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the questionnaire results.

Table 1: Lecturers' Behaviors and Beliefs about Using Social Media in Higher Education

Lecturers' Behaviors and Beliefs about Using Social Media in Higher Education	Level of Behavior		
	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1) Implement social media in regular instruction			
1.1) Facebook	2.97	2.09	moderate
1.2) Twitter	1.06	1.32	lowest
1.3) YouTube	3.13	2.17	moderate
1.4) Blogs	1.45	1.71	lowest
1.5) Myspace	0.90	1.11	lowest
1.6) Wikis	1.19	1.58	lowest
1.7) LinkedIn	0.94	1.09	lowest
1.8) Flickr	0.90	1.19	lowest
1.9) Slideshare	1.48	1.73	lowest
1.10) Podcasts	0.87	1.09	lowest
2) Integrate the characteristics of social media in regular instruction	2.84	2.00	moderate
3) Believe that social media can be a tool for teaching	2.97	2.06	moderate
4) Believe that social media can enhance the learning process	2.90	1.99	moderate
5) Believe that social media can facilitate collaborative learning	2.94	2.93	moderate
6) Believe that social media can improve problem solving abilities	2.74	1.89	moderate
7) Believe that social media can develop project abilities	2.94	2.02	moderate
8) Believe that social media are easy to use and save time and money for online courses	3.10	2.10	moderate

As shown in the table, the three social media sites most frequently used in regular instruction were YouTube (moderate level of agreement; $\bar{x}$ = 3.13, S.D. = 2.17), Facebook (moderate level; $\bar{x}$ = 2.97, S.D. = 2.09), and Slideshare (low level; $\bar{x}$ = 1.48, S.D. = 1.73), in that order.

The lecturers moderately agreed that most social media are easy to use and save time and money for online courses ($\bar{x}$ = 3.10, S.D. = 2.10). They also expressed moderate belief that social media can be a tool for teaching ($\bar{x}$ = 2.97, S.D. = 2.06), facilitate collaborative learning ($\bar{x}$ = 2.94, S.D. = 2.93), and develop project abilities ($\bar{x}$ = 2.94, S.D. = 2.02).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results show that the social media most frequently used in regular instruction were YouTube, Facebook, and Slideshare. This finding accords with those of previous studies; for example, Moran et al. (2011) found that Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, Flickr, Slideshare, blogs, wikis, and podcasts are widely used in higher education. YouTube and Facebook were also the most frequently cited when lecturers reported their uses of social media in their teaching practice. The researchers further revealed that lecturers believed social media sites offer value in teaching. An overwhelming majority reported that they believed videos, podcasts, and wikis are valuable tools for teaching, and a majority reported that social media sites can be valuable tools for collaborative learning. Facebook is currently considered the most popular platform for online social networking among university students (Kabilan et al., 2010). It is potentially a valuable resource for supporting student communication and collaboration with lecturers. Therefore, students have widely adopted its use (Roblyer, 2010). Most office workers also use it (Ruangsawat, 2010). Lecturers believe that social media is easy to use and saves time and money for online courses; moreover, they find that social media can be a tool for teaching, facilitating collaborative learning, and improving project abilities. Therefore, social media can be a valuable tool for online learning, similar to the perceived attributes of innovations, including relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability (Rogers, 2003). However, the results of this study differ from those of Ajjan and Hartshorne (2008), who found that while some faculty members believe Web 2.0 technologies could improve students' learning, their interaction with faculty and their peers, writing abilities, and satisfaction with the course, few instructors actually choose to use them in the classroom. Moreover, lecturers use social media in their regular

instruction at a moderate level. Lecturers who wish to have the highest performing technology available and are eager for new solutions are labeled innovators (Rogers, 2003; Tantaphalin, 2010). The result is similar to the S-shaped adopter distribution, which rises slowly at first, whenever there are only a few adopters in each time period. Then, the innovation may ultimately be rejected (Rogers, 2003). The results of this research provide foundational data to guide instructional designers and lecturers to design courses that implement the use of social media, especially in regular instruction. This instructional model can help learners achieve their learning objectives. Therefore, instructors should be encouraged to use social media in their regular instruction as an effective tool for 21st century learning.

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