

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSE: PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERTS

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Хураангуй

Сүүлийн 10 гаруй жилийн турш сошиал медиа хүмүүсийн өдөр тутмын амьдралд гүнзгий нэвтэрч, байнгын ашигладаг хэрэглэгдэхүүний нэг болсоор байна. Хүмүүс сошиал медиаг хувийн болон бизнес харилцаандаа ашиглаж, түүнчлэн өөрийгөө хөгжүүлэх, боловсруулах, зугаацуулах зэрэг олон зорилгоор ашиглаж байна. Өнөөдөр дэлхий дээр сошиал медиа хэрэглэгчдийн тоо хэдэн тэрбум болон өссөөр байгаагийн нэг жишээ нь Фэйсбүүк юм. Тухайлбал, Фэйсбүүк нь 2018 оны эхний улирлын байдлаар 1.45 тэрбум өдөр тутмын идэвхтэй хэрэглэгчтэй бол, 2.2 тэрбум сар тутмын идэвхтэй хэрэглэгчтэй байна (Facebook investor news, 2018). Энэхүү өсөлтийг дагаад бүхий л салбарууд сошиал медиаг хэрхэн ашиглаж, давуу тал бий болгох талаар судлан, хэрэгжүүлж байгаа юм.

Тиймээс сошиал медиаг боловсролд ашиглах боломжийн талаар судалж, их сургуулийн багш нар болон хөндлөнгийн мэргэжилтнүүдийн санал бодлыг сонсохыг зорьсон юм. Гэхдээ энэхүү ажлаар хөндлөнгийн мэргэжилтнүүдтэй хийсэн ярилцлагын үр дүнг танилцуулах болно. Ярилцлагын үр дүнд, боловсролын салбарт сошиал медиа хэдийн нэвтэрч эхэлсэн нь илэрсэн.

Түлхүүр үгс: сошиал медиа, онлайн сургалт, Фэйсбүүк, сургалтын хэрэглэгдэхүүн

Abstract

Today, billions of people use social media daily for their various social interactions including, self-development, business correspondence and communication, education and entertainment and so forth. Use of social media has evolved as life routine of people just like breathing and eating and can be accessed on different devices disregard of time and venue. Facebook, one of the most popular social media, has 1.45 billion daily active users and 2.2 billion monthly active users as of March 2018 (Facebook investor news, 2018). As a consequence of this phenomenal growth of social media, every sector including education is facing new challenges and opportunities. Digital technologies, Internet and social media are transforming traditional methods of delivering education. Nowadays, education becomes more dynamic and has to be evolved continuously depending on the target groups. Therefore, educators face challenges to update academic curriculum and teaching methods to deliver a quality education, so that students can acquire adequate knowledge and skills to become employable globally.

Thus, this study tries to reveal social media experts' perceptions on using social media as an educational tool. Accordingly, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with 2 social media experts. Findings of this research revealed that university educators need to be more open to utilising social media as additives to enhance their traditional teaching methods.

Key words: social media, e – learning, Facebook, educational tool

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, social media has penetrated in our lives with high-speed. For instance, only 7% of the American adults used at least 1 social media platform in 2005, whereas in 2015, it has reached 65% (Perrin, 2015). At the global level, social media platforms have billions of users such as Facebook 2.2 billion, YouTube 1.5 billion, WhatsApp 1.5 billion and Instagram 0.9 billion users as of March 2018 (Social media statistics, 2018). Consequently, ubiquity of social media tools and digital technologies changes the way of learning. However, Tess suggests that educators should provide an opportunity

for students to be involved in the social media classroom. Teachers should not use the social media platform merely to post “teacher-generated contents”, yet to create an interactive learning environment (Tess, 2013). Therefore, it's important to study possibilities of using social media to improve teaching and learning methods.

As Mongolian younger population holds one third of total population, delivering an education that well responds to their need is a critical issue. Furthermore, 1.9 million users have smartphones out of which 1.33 million have subscribed to mobile data network (CITA, 2016). In addition,

1.6 million users have active Facebook accounts (Facebook statistics for Mongolia, 2018). Given the statistics and fact, we need to carefully examine possibilities of digital technologies and Internet based platforms in order to deliver quality education to most distant areas of Mongolia. Specifically, as more than half of the population uses social media, the social media oriented education can be effective in Mongolia. This study investigates the potential of social media as a tool to provide an education in Mongolia.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

Use of social media for academic purpose is increasing rapidly with the fast penetration of social media. Plethora of studies have confirmed that the use of social media including Facebook, YouTube, Blog and Twitter can facilitate learning process positively despite any obstacles (Falahah and Rosmala, 2012; Manca and Ranieri, 2016; Hamid et al., 2015; Paul et al., 2012; Sarapin and Morris, 2015; Sobaih et al., 2016; Tess, 2013; Miller et al., 2017). When social media is used for academic purpose, students engage more in learning process, appreciate to be identified individually and foster more interest in the subject regardless of the content (Yaros, 2012). University College of London also carried series of in-depth global research on social media usages and consequences on key topics such as education, work, politics, gender and so on (Miller and et al., 2017). Social media impact on education had two opposite results in this research. Some believe that social media improves social relations between people engaged in learning process and provides additional tools to enhance traditional learning, while others argue that social media is a distraction from learning (Miller and et al., 2017). Joosten has also explored that on social media her students are more connected with each other and with the instructor (Joosten, 2012). Social media benefits include fast delivery of information, prompt and easy communication and others while obstacles include students' waste of time, doubtful information and others (Falahah and Rosmala, 2012; Manca and Ranieri, 2016).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research objectives

The overall goal of this research is to assess the usage of social media for academic purpose, as

perceived by the social media experts. Following questions will guide this study.

1. What are the respondents' perceptions of social media for general use?
2. How respondents see the ethics and behaviours of social media users of Mongolia?
3. What are the respondent's perspectives on social media use for academic purposes?
4. How to deal if conflict arises?

3.2 Research design

With the purpose of understanding social media experts' interpretation of social media usage in academic settings, the researcher followed Saunders et al.'s suggestion of conducting an exploratory research and applied following methods:

1. Search for relevant literature;
2. Talk to experts in the field;
3. Conduct focus group interviews (Saunders et al., 2009).

In order to gain deep insights, the researcher applied above methods including literature review and interviews with social media experts and university educators from Mongolia. However, this paper presents findings of interviews with social media experts.

3.3 Data collection

This study used a literature review and semi-structured interview method to collect data. The literature review contributed to build a deep understanding of the context around social media usage in higher education. Semi-structured interviews gave flexibility to the researcher and freedom to respondents to express their opinions.

The researcher wanted to obtain insights from experts who provide trainings using social media and consulting services for individuals and companies. These interviews were conducted at the experts' work places and lasted 30 to 45 minutes. Topic sheet was sent to both experts, recording instruction was provided and consent to record was sought prior to each interview.

3.4 Selection of the experts

The interviewees were selected in consideration of their profession and experience in social media training services. In Mongolia, organisations

which provide social media trainings and services are very few. Therefore, the researcher did some studies including surfing on the Internet, asking from customers and checking popularity on social media and has chosen 3 organisations in this field. CEOs and educators of the companies were contacted and 2 of them agreed to give interview. These two interviewees are both CEOs of their respective companies. These experts conduct social media and digital marketing services and trainings for individuals and organisations. Both experts were very helpful and gave useful insights and perspectives on social media use in Mongolian higher education and its future trends.

4. FINDINGS

These findings will include description of the experts and main ideas that were drawn from the interview data. The interviews commenced with background questions including age, gender, work experience, degree qualification and working field.

One expert is 35 years old and other expert is 42 years old. Both experts, CEOs of marketing companies are male and have master's degree from developed countries. They have been using Facebook and Twitter more than 10 years. Plus, they blog to express opinions, share experiences, write stories, advertise their company and so forth. The experts admitted that their professional features have exposed them to variety of different social media.

EX1 mainly uses: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Quora, ResearchGate, YouTube (He has own channel on YouTube), Facebook messenger, SlideShare and others for various purposes. He also mentioned Facebook as an unbeatable and universal platform.

EX2 mainly uses: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Medium, Snapchat, Foursquare, Pinterest, Soundcloud, SlideShare and others for various purposes.

4.1 General social media use in Mongolia

Both experts confirmed the statistics found in literature review that 1.3 to 1.6 million are counted as active users of Facebook and 4000 to 5000 as active users of Twitter. Interestingly, almost 80 percent of the social media market share goes via Facebook and 20 percent via other forms of the social media. The EX1 pointed

out that Mongolians are of curious nature that such curiosity caused such high penetration of Facebook. He highlighted the following as well:

"Mongolian culture supports social media usage in everyday life. Almost everyone I know is on social media. For instance, in London 2012 Olympics, Mongolia ranked in the top position with the most number of tweets for this Olympic Games. Social media permeated this quick and massive because of Mongolian nomadic nature, curiosity and naivety." EX1

4.2 Use of social media for academic purpose

Both experts were in favour of social media use for academic purpose. They think social media offers opportunities educators to interact with students more effectively, use classroom time more useful and so on. EX1 used his case as a trainer to use social media in his teaching practice. He said he has been forced to use social media because his trainees check social media more regularly than any other communication platforms. Following is excerpt from EX1:

"I want to share my own experience with others. I have a YouTube channel which contains series of lectures, a blog which has announcements, essay topics, exemplars and Facebook groups to conduct a class discussion, to make announcements, and so forth. This situation enables me to use Facebook for my teaching activities as I make a real time connection with my students." EX1

Second expert (EX2) emphasized the importance of creating sharing culture among university educators. When teachers share more useful contents on social media, they will receive more benefits. He suggested that educators need to learn monetise their skills using benefits of social media. His opinion on this subject as follows:

"Education is becoming more democratic, open and free. For example, many top universities offer free courses online. Teachers didn't share their resources with others. Now, the more you are open, the more you will become successful. When I post my teaching materials online, people keep saying that nobody will come to study if I do so! Conversely, people want to hear from me, learn from me, I have a tacit knowledge that no one has and they're going to get valuable knowledge. Therefore, I support the use of social media in education. By using social media in education, it's going to reveal who knows what and who's the expert."

This might create fear to some teachers but opportunity to most teachers. Good example of social media usage in education is LinkedIn Learning” EX2

4.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of social media

Advantages of social media as aforementioned by the experts included the easy to share contents such as exemplar essays, brochure materials and others, easy to make announcements and negotiations, simple headhunting tools than traditional way, valuable feedback gained from customers, extended relationship building and targeted advertising. On the other hand, the experts revealed following disadvantages of social media as deteriorated official relationship, unverified and overwhelming information and magnifying the context into Mongolian case, there is a very thin line between official and private relationship on Facebook, frauds and identity theft, privacy issues and easy distractions.

4.4 Social media users’ ethics, culture and behaviour

Following quotations demonstrate the experts’ opinion on Mongolian social media users’ ethics, culture and behaviour. Both experts explicitly agreed that ethical and cultural issue is a broader subject that further investigations must be proceeded. Overall, Mongolians’ social media ethics need to be improved. Both experts confirmed the idea of cultural difference would affect the social media usage. EX1 believes that Facebook will become biggest platform that merged everything useful for people. He also mentioned following in his interview:

“I’m forced to use Facebook everyday because it’s easier to find my colleagues, my customers and partners on this platform. Moreover, on Facebook you can watch Youtube videos, read blogs, watch news, see Instagram photos and Twitter tweets, so this is becoming one big platform for other social media. There is no wonder that Facebook shares 80 percent of the whole social media market in Mongolia. We need to conduct social media research on a country level by different issues such politics, medical, entertainment, sales and so forth.” EX1

EX2 shared his opinion on cultural issue as following:

“Culture difference is a real issue in here. For example, when I meet a person for the first time for a business meeting, he/she sends a friend request afterwards. It creates dilemma whether I accept this request or not. This is very Mongolian culture, to invade people’s privacy without asking. Every country adopts Facebook by its own culture, so in Mongolian case there is no distinction between official and private use of social media.” EX2

Both experts agreed that intellectual people and role models from different sectors can make a positive influence on social media. Moreover, social media policy should be developed. Mongolians need to learn to respect other’s privacy and basic rights.

4.5 Conflicts, negative comments and cyber attacks

The response by social media experts were parallel to this question. They accepted that a lot of conflicts and negative comments happen on social media, however, they learned to ignore and see the positive sides of the negative comments. One expert shared his instance of negative comment which resulted in improvement of Mongolian biggest cashmere brand’s coat. On social media, arguing with negative commenters, lunatics or attackers will bring no success. Instead of arguing, people need to learn ignoring and for the worst case learn to use reporting system or block them.

4.6 Future developments, innovation and trends of social media

Interestingly, both experts’ ideas were connected with virtual reality and artificial intelligence and both used Facebook as an example. They predicted that Facebook will launch a virtual environment soon enough. Below, the experts’ views on future trends of social media are shown.

“I think Facebook will act as a virtual person for individuals. Whenever social interaction is needed, my virtual person on Facebook will communicate and do the job instead of me. So, I think our Facebook account will represent us virtually in different social interactions” EX1

“Facebook Live is the beginning of further developments. I think we don't have to wait for a long time to use virtual reality and augmented reality embedded on Facebook. For example, social news conference can be held in virtual reality. We can augment the news conference environment using Facebook. Participants' profile can be shown while that person talks, if people leave the conference, we can augment like those people leaving the actual conference room and so on. Artificial Intelligence of Facebook is going to be very big. Recently, Facebook's AI robots started to chat with each other using newly created language by themselves and Facebook shut it down. In the end, the world might use more virtual relationship than a face-to-face relationship” EX2

4.7 Additional comments from the experts

Last question was an open question to respondents. One respondent pointed out the importance of considering cultural difference when using social media for academic purpose. He cited a direct quotation from Roy Chapman Andrews, *“Mongolians are very curious, when I'm in the countryside people come from 20, 30 even from 50 kilometers away just to see and touch my car. They ask many questions and hurry to spread the news about the car”*. Hence, this curiosity is the main factor of fast penetration of social media in Mongolia.

Other respondent highlighted the significance of educator's perspective on content sharing over social media. He pointed out that educators can promote their research materials and books, earn money, and become well-known scholar using social media platforms.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Findings from this study show that Facebook can be an effective tool to teach and learn in academic environment. Facebook's exponential growth and potentials should be concerned by higher education institutes as it is becoming an universal platform. Therefore, university educators need to be more open to utilising social media as additives to enhance their traditional teaching methods. Moreover, the respondents mentioned the importance of improving ethics and creating policy and guidelines on social media usage. Main motivation to use social media was the fast communication with others.

In addition, the interviews revealed that cultural

differences and ethical issues are crucial factors to social media adoption. According to the interviewees, in Mongolian social media environment, ethical norms are somehow low, so intellectual people and role models can make a positive influence on social media and raise the ethical norms. What is more, raising awareness on importance of respecting other people's cultural value and personal preferences is important. Therefore, developing policy on social media use is a significant task for policy makers. The experts also suggested to ignore when conflict arises. Another interesting idea that was extracted from experts is virtual reality and artificial intelligence development. They believe that soon virtual reality will be available on social network platforms, specifically on Facebook, and individual's Facebook account will act as a virtual person on social interactions.

For further research, it can be useful to choose only Facebook as teaching and learning tool as this social networking platform is used by 1.6 million Mongolians. Furthermore, it can be interesting to explore what types of divide does social media create among educators, students, and others.

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