

# Students' Perception towards the Use of Social Networking as an e-learning Platform

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**Abstract:** - The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perceptions on the current e-learning system and adopting social networking as a main platform of the university e-learning. This study also explored the required skill for effective use of social networking tools. The population of this study were 600 final year students at one of the Faculties in a Malaysian's university. Questionnaire was used as a research instrument to collect data from 234 respondents which had been selected randomly. Data had been analyzed using quantitative data analysis method, which were mean, percentage, and Independent-sample T test. The findings of this study indicated that students satisfaction of current e-learning system was in a moderately positive level (mean = 3.77). Students agreed on adopting social networking as an e-learning platform (mean = 4.11) and they also agreed with all of the required skills for effectively use of social networking tools (mean = 4.17). From this study also, type of students' study programme has no effect on students' perception neither towards current e-learning system nor in the required skills of using social networking effectively. However; there was a significant difference between male and female students in the required skills of using social networking tools at  $\alpha = 0.05$  ( $p = 0.014$ ). Female students appeared to be more skilful and ready for using social networking tools (mean = 4.23) than male students (mean = 4.07). From this research finding, it can be concluded that students preferred social networking as an e-learning platform, where it can provide them more interactive features than the current e-learning system.

**Key-Words:** - e-learning, Social networking, Distance learning, social media, Internet in Education.

## 1 Introduction

E-learning is a very important tool to assist and facilitate teaching and learning process. It provides the tools for learners to be in contact with peers and teachers outside the classroom. It also empowers learners to manage their own learning and in the most appropriate way for each learner. Learners learn in different ways which are reading, watching, exploring, researching, interacting, communicating, collaborating, discussing, and sharing knowledge and experiences. Through e-Learning, learners can have access to a wide range of learning resources and learning can occur anywhere, anytime, and there are no longer any geographical constraints to learning.

Ming-Chi [1] stated that e-learning users face several new constraints, such as the impersonal nature of the online environment. O'Hear [2] pointed out that;

*"Traditional approach to e-learning tends to be structured around courses, timetables, and testing an approach that is too often driven by the needs of the institution rather than the individual learner."*

Furthermore, Ebner [3] stated that in current e-learning, lecturers deliver the content, students learn it, and there was no memorable change, less collaboration, less learner participation, and grading.

Most of current e-learning systems in Malaysian's universities are based on Learning Management System (LMS). In one of Malaysian's universities; which was the sample of this study; Moodle as an open source LMS has adopted as an e-learning system since 2004. Moodle is a LMS based on learner-oriented philosophy which promotes social constructing pedagogy that engage students in constructing their own knowledge and share it with colleague [4]. However, through LMS, the content of the courses is fully controlled by the lecturers. In other words, the effective use of the e-

learning is totally depending on the participation of lecturers in managing the course [5]. According to Sbihi and El Kadiri [6], the content is the secondary concern among those being responsible for e-learning.

Nowadays, the new generation spend more time on social network in their daily life for social purposes. Social network media are seen to support a range of applications which display qualities associated with educational technologies already in use at university level such as communication, participation, interactivity and collaboration [7]. Therefore, there is opportunities that social software technologies provide good spaces or platforms for students' learning [7]. Awodele et al. [8] have found that the level of participation, interaction and collaboration within the students and lecturers has also increased with the use of social tools in e-learning.

It is important to conduct study to discover students' attitudes towards current e-learning after the emergence of these new tools, and to know their opinions about adopting new e-learning platform based on social network. That effort will be carried out to enhance the online learning environment in universities.

Therefore, this study investigated the students' perception towards current e-learning system in one of Malaysian universities. At the same time, this study will give the students the opportunity to express their opinion regarding the adoption of the social network software as a platform of the suggested improvement in the e-learning system for more creative and interactive learning environment and to avoid deficiencies that appeared in current e-learning system. This study also identified the required skills to use social networking tools effectively by students.

## 2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To investigate students' perception on the current e-learning system.
- ii. To discover students' perception towards adopting social network as an e-learning platform.
- iii. To identify required skills for effective use of social networking tools among students.
- iv. To identify the differences on students' perception of current e-learning system, their perception towards adopting social networking tools as an e-learning platform and their skills to use social networking tools based on their gender and type of the programme of study.

## 3 Research Method

This study used a quantitative research design based on a survey method through questionnaires. The survey method employed in this research because it is an efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents. Besides that, this method is easy to administer and cheaper to conduct.

### 3.1 Population and Sample

The population of the study was 600 students of the final year undergraduate students in one of the faculties in a Malaysian university. The age of the respondents ranged between 20 to 27 years old. 234 students were randomly selected based on a table for determining a sample size by Krejcie and Morgan [9].

### 3.2 Research Instruments

The main research instrument of this study is a questionnaire. It consists of four sections; Part A: Students' perceptions of university existing e-learning system, Part B: Students' opinion on adopting social networking tools, Part C: Students' skills in using social networking tools, Part D: Demographic data of respondents.

Part A consists of 18 items adapted from previous study in learners' acceptance of e-learning conducted by Lee et al. [10]. Part B consists of 14 items adopted from Ophus and Abbitt [11] from a study entitled Exploring the Potential Perceptions of Social Networking Systems in University Courses. Part C consists of 12 items self-developed by the researchers while Part D consists of items to collect personal data of the respondents. Part A, B, and C were using 5-points Likert scale, which was Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Pilot study was conducted to check the reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability index (Cronbach Alpha) of the questionnaire was 0.864. The obtained Cronbach Alpha shows the questionnaire has high reliability.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

All quantitative data had been analyzed descriptively and inferentially using Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean and standard deviation had been computed for descriptive data analysis while independent-sample t test had been used for inferential analysis.

## 4 Findings

The percentage of the female respondents was 67.10%, while the male respondents were only 32.90% of the respondents. 54.7% of the

respondents enrolled in non-computer-based programme of study while 45.3% enrolled in computer-based programme of study.

#### 4.1 Perception towards University Existing e-Learning System

The data in the Table 1 gives an idea about respondents' perception towards university e-learning system.

**Table 1: Perception towards existing e-learning**

NO	Question	Mean	SD
9	E-learning forum is for knowledge sharing.	4.11	0.65
16	The content in the existing e-learning system only can be modified by the lecturer.	4.07	0.71
8	E-learning forum is open space for instructional discussion.	3.97	0.74
10	E-learning space is for collaboration and interactivity.	3.97	0.72
5	E-learning provides useful and relevant content.	3.90	0.77
15	The existing e-learning system is controlled by lecturer	3.88	0.79
6	E-learning provides suitable learning environment.	3.87	0.80
3	I enjoy the portion of the course on e-learning	3.87	0.75
2	I am satisfied with e-learning services provided.	3.79	0.82
11	E-learning only allows lecturer to control the content.	3.74	1.04
13	Students only can upload notes if required by their lecturer.	3.72	0.95
4	E-learning meets my needs and interest.	3.71	0.81
7	E-learning limits my ability to be a content producer/ developer.	3.37	0.89
12	The current e-learning system did not allow students to control their learning environment.	3.28	1.00
14	E-learning limits peer to peer interactivity.	3.26	1.01
<b>Overall</b>		<b>3.77</b>	<b>0.26</b>

\*n= 234

#### 4.2 Perception towards Adopting Social Networking as an e-Learning Platform

Table 2 shows the findings on students' perception towards adopting social networking an e-learning platform.

**Table 2: Perception towards adopting social networking as an e-learning platform**

NO	Question	Mean	SD
2	Social networking is a current way how university students get connected.	4.24	0.58
4	I enjoy my time when using social networking tools.	4.24	0.67
5	Social network meets students' needs and interests.	4.18	0.64
11	Through social networking application, I can freely create and participate in group discussion	4.17	0.57
8	Social networking tools provide reliable means for communication.	4.14	0.68
6	Social networking tools increase students' creativity and interactivity.	4.11	0.65
14	By using social networking application as a main platform of e-learning students will be able to personalized their own learning	4.11	0.62
10	I can post and evaluate content freely in social networking applications.	4.09	0.67
7	Social networking tools facilitate knowledge sharing.	4.09	0.71
3	Through social networking learning environment I can get what information I want.	4.09	0.67
13	By using social networking tools as e-learning platform, lecturer will act as a facilitator.	3.98	0.74
12	Social networking applications enable me to be knowledge producer rather than consumer.	3.97	0.71
9	I can control my learning environment if social networking tools will be used as an e-learning platform.	3.96	0.82
<b>Overall</b>		<b>4.11</b>	<b>0.09</b>

\*n= 234

### 4.3 Students' Skills in Using Social Networking Tools

Table 3 shows students' skills in using social networking.

**Table 3: Students' skills in using social networking tools**

NO	Question	Mean	SD
6	Desire to share knowledge with others.	4.25	0.64
1	Downloading and uploading files through internet.	4.23	0.61
7	Like to learn from others.	4.22	0.63
9	Experience of using social networking tools such as facebook etc.	4.22	0.73
5	Knowledge and skills to share with others.	4.21	0.67
3	Experience of using online discussion tools.	4.20	0.59
2	Experience of internet navigation.	4.10	0.61
4	Enough reading and writing skills to communicate with others easily.	4.07	0.76
8	Prefer to work with online group.	4.06	0.74
<b>Overall</b>		<b>4.17</b>	<b>0.07</b>

\*n= 234

### 4.3 Differences of Findings based on Gender and Programme of Study

Table 4 and 5 show the independent-sample t test analysis data based on gender and programme of study.

**Table 4: T test analysis based on gender**

Findings	Mean		p
	Male	Female	
1. Perception towards existing e-learning	3.73	3.79	0.30
2. Perception towards adopting social networking as an e-learning platform	4.03	4.15	0.06
3. Students' skills in using social networking tools	4.07	4.23	0.01*

\*Significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$

**Table 5: T test analysis based on programme of study**

Findings	Mean		p
	Male	Female	
1. Perception towards existing e-learning	3.73	3.82	0.10
2. Perception towards adopting social networking as an e-learning platform	4.07	4.16	0.14
3. Students' skills in using social networking tools	4.16	4.20	0.51

$\alpha = 0.05$

## 5 Discussion

Based on the findings stated in Table 1, most of students have a moderate positive perception towards e-learning. From the findings, e-learning forum captured most of the students' attention (highest mean) due to its interactivity functions in e-learning system. Students strongly agreed that e-learning forum is for knowledge sharing and e-learning space is for collaboration and interactivity. Most of them believe that e-learning forum is an open space for instructional discussion.

As a technology generation and because of their independent and dominant connection to the internet, students like to manage their learning environment, be a content producer, and like to be in regular interactivity with peers. This desire will be restrained by the e-learning system which is controlled by the lecturers where all online activities should be initiated by lecturers by opening a link for any discussion or content uploading. Students faced those problems in the current e-learning system because information is seldom updated by lecturers [5]. However, this study has revealed that most of the students agreed that social networking applications enable them to be knowledge producer rather than consumer. They can control their learning environment if social networking tools will be used as an e-learning platform.

Students also agreed that the modification of the e-learning content is limited to the lecturer where students can only upload notes if required by the lecturer. Therefore, further action should be taken where students should be given more control on the e-learning content. They should be given the control to select and present the tasks and content, as well as the transfer process, according to their needs and preferences [12].

Based on data in Table 2, the study revealed that students have positive perceptions towards adopting

social networking as an e-learning platform. The collaborative and interactive learning environment that provided by social networking tools led to students belief that these tools are the suitable tools for the contemporary learning environment in the university. Using social networking tools, student can share knowledge and exchange ideas with peers and teachers to enrich their knowledge and make more interactive learning environment.

Social networking tools interactivity features make it different from other websites. Therefore, students believe that social networking tools provide a reliable means of communication. Students also support statement that social networking tools increase students' creativity and interactivity and facilitate knowledge sharing. Additionally, social networking tools affect interaction positively between students-teacher and students-students where it also provide students with opportunity to choose the best tool for interaction as a solution to the limitations of social communication tools and personal profile tools, most of which are related with learning management systems [13].

This study also revealed that students agreed that through social networking tools they can freely create and participate in group discussion. They believe by using social networking application as a main platform of e-learning, students will be able to personalize their own learning. Beside that students also agreed that they can post and evaluate content freely in social networking applications.

Students clear attitude and agreement towards the user control of learning through social networking caused by the level of flexibility and freedom provided by social networking tools. Social networking tools support the personal learning environment and recognise the role of the individual in organising and managing his or her own learning [14]. Social networking tools is an open space for youth to express their tendency to be in touch with peers and friends attracted them to be heavy users of these tools; on the other hand it positively affect interaction between students-teacher and students-students by creating more satisfying environments [15].

These findings also indicated students' tendency to create and have more control of their learning environment with lecturers' role as a facilitator and adviser and that features provided by social networking tools. Social networking tools meet today's students' demands to have greater control of their own learning and inclusion new technologies that meet their needs and preferences [16].

In terms of what are the required skills the students should have to be able to use those tools

effectively, this study has revealed that (Refer Table 3) most of them agreed with all the followings skills:

- i. Downloading and uploading files
- ii. Experience of using social networking and online discussion tools and Internet
- iii. Knowledge and skills to share with others
- iv. Willingness to learn from others and online group members
- v. Reading and writing skills to communicate

T-test result indicated (Refer Table 4) that there is no significant difference on respondents' perception of current e-learning and perception towards adopting social networking as an e-learning platform between male and female students with. As earlier mentioned, the e-learning system in the university is used by all the students with no regards to field of study or gender. This result is a contrast with the finding which stated that males register more perception towards e-learning than females [17]. For the required skills to use social networking tools effectively, the study has revealed that there is a significant difference between male and female students' responses.

The findings obtained for independent sample t-test comparing non-computer-based students and computer-based students, found there is no significant difference between the two groups for all of three research findings. A previous study compared computer-based and lecture-based computer literacy course found that neither computer-based instruction nor lecture-based instruction significantly affected students' attitudes towards computers [18].

## 6 Conclusion

The overall findings in this study showed that students highly accept social networking tools to be a main platform of e-learning in the university and they are ready to use it as well. It is obvious that social networking tools have the ability to be the preferable tool for university students' communication and interaction. Overall, it was evident that the students need more interactive learning environment that allows them to have greater chances to manage and control their online learning environment. The lecturers' role based in these findings is to guide students and to be their consultant and advisor throughout their learning process. Additionally, it is important for universities to be aware of students' current needs and interest related to their learning environment for better knowledge acquisition and academic achievement.

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