From Information to Empowerment Tertiary Students' Experiences with the Use of Social Media in Learning

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Abstract
The aim of this paper is to examine tertiary students' learning outcomes, experiences and perceptions of using social media; YouTube to enable a collaborative and participatory learning process. From a survey of literature on tertiary students' use of social media for experiential and participatory learning, there seems to be very little evidence of detailed examination to gather students' perceptions and experiences and to determine learning outcomes. Thus, this present study of participatory and collaborative learning supported by scaffolding provides an attractive glimpse of the use of social media, such as YouTube videos created by groups of tertiary students in class. Two groups of tertiary students, adult learners from the University of Social Sciences in Singapore, were the participants as case study of this study. This paper, with a discussion of social-constructivist learning theory, is to determine if the leveraging of social media is able to provide adult learners with a tool to implement a collaborative and participatory process in which students move from being informed to an active learner and self-directed learner of their own, hence an empowerment of learning from information.

Keywords: Social Media Technologies, YouTube, Digital Technology and Communications, Tertiary Students' Learning Experiences

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Introduction

In this present study of participatory and collaborative learning supported by scaffolding provides an attractive glimpse of social constructivist learning theory with the use of social media, such as YouTube videos created by groups of two groups of tertiary students, adult learners from the University of Social Sciences in Singapore who were the participants as case study of this study. Students were provided online learning lessons and materials for a Communication module via Canvas learning management system and they were tasked to leverage on YouTube video for a class presentation for teaching and learning. After which, a survey and interview were conducted for data gathering after all the groups have participated in their learning process. Qualitative text analysis of the interview script analysis clarified the different merits of leveraging of social media as experienced and perceived by students from the group activity and the presentation. The leveraging of social media, YouTube video as a learning tool for collaborative and participatory learning served well in meeting challenges set in the learning outcomes and from the survey and interviews conducted, students found this way of learning to be both enjoyable and useful and benefitted them both in empowerment in learning and in learning collaboratively.

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research method based on grounded theory that uses a systematic set of procedure to develop an inductively grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to better understand students' learning and students' perceptions of using social media for learning. The study uses a data collection approach that is by conducting an email-based questionnaire survey targeted at SUSS undergraduate adult students. The questionnaire primarily serves as a purpose to retrieve data regarding three aspects. The first aspect will be to identify what students' needs are in seeking learning information from social media which consist of students' reasons for learning in which learning could be either formal or casual, the information sources used and information type or category. The second aspect will be to understand how students explore learning resources. The third aspect will be to analyse students' perceptions in using social media for learning which consist of usability issues and problems encountered.

The questionnaire will consist of two sections. In the first section, the focus will be on identification of students' needs in social media learning and understanding behaviour of students' who use social media learning based on students' responses. The second section focus will be identification of usability issues and problems encountered by students when they use social media as a tool for learning. Analysis of data was carried out manually using grounded theory of open coding, constant comparison, memos, axial coding and then theory generation.

Theoretical Discussion

This paper is written to provide an in-depth understanding of students' learning experiences and perceptions of using social media for learning via the social constructivist learning theory. Social constructivist learning theory is derived from Vygotsky's social constructivism theory in 1978 that students' learning is of a collaborative nature. Learning collaboratively and from one another is more effective

in learning than independent learning that contributes to achievement oriented and creating collaborative beneficial outcomes. In this current digital mediated age that is inundated with every day use of social media, learning is no longer an individual activity but an information creation and sharing society where learners learn through multiple resources via the social media platform (Chen & Bryan, 2012).

What is Social Media?

Social media refers to a broad range of applications that enables users to create, share, comment, and discuss a multitude of digital content(s). It is regarded as 'dynamic', 'interactive', 'democratic', 'people centric', 'volatile', 'social', and 'adaptive' (Manca & Ranieri, 2016b). Another aspect of social media that is often overlooked is its ability to transform teaching/learning into a more social, open, and collaboration-oriented endeavour and the use of social media and its potential as a learning tool (Osgerby & Rush, 2015) are indeed worth researching in the 21st century of social mediated society. Blogs, Wikis, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are some of the more common forms of social media (Gao, Luo, & Zhang, 2012). YouTube grants the students satisfaction due to the use of videos in a traditional classroom setting (Torres-Ramírez García-Domingo, Aguilera, & Casa, 2014).

YouTube is an example of social media that allows for the formation of social relationships that revolves around uploaded videos. YouTube is the third most visited website in the world, behind Google and Facebook (Alexa, 2015). Videos pertaining to education, entertainment, marketing, and science are constantly being uploaded to YouTube since 2005. It was confirmed that many students used YouTube to learn and seek information, however, studies show that the use of YouTube for academic learning and its effectiveness as a teaching tool lag far behind other social media, such as Facebook. Its usage in a higher education classroom setting is fast becoming a niche endeavour(Torres-Ramírez et al., 2014). It is reported that the use of YouTube to teach nursing procedures improved the students' attention and retention, due to the fact that it is much easier to remember visual cues than auditory ones (Johnson & Mayer, 2009). Students reported higher satisfaction and increased retention when social media is integrated into their courses (Alon & Herath, 2014).

What is Blended Learning?

Driscoll (2002) defines blended learning as mixing of any instructional forms to achieve an educational goal, while Garrison and Kanuka (2004) note that to blend simply means integrating classroom teaching with online experiences. Singh (2003) explains blended learning as combining different delivery media to promote meaningful and motivating learning. Live chats, self-paced learning, instant messaging, social networking, blog and forums, applications, and webinars are examples of tools that educators are able to incorporate online opportunities into their lessons.

As with all pedagogies for learning, there are positive aspects and the challenges and in terms of the feasibility and applicability of implementing hybrid learning in higher education context, a body of research supports the idea of combining face-to-face instruction with an online delivery mode. Such a combination provides better learning outcomes (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). The trend of merging asynchronous Internet

technology with face-to-face interaction is associated with improved pedagogy and easier access to information (Bonk & Graham, 2004). Similarly, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) suggest that blended teaching can facilitate independent and collaborative learning experiences.

Blended learning, according to Fleck, Beckman, Sterns, & Hussey (2014), was used to examine the usage of YouTube in a classroom setting. He noted that students are receptive towards using familiar online learning tools, which ultimately enhance their learning experience. Blended learning also allows the students to be flexible and to freely provide feedbacks vis-à-vis the course (Alebaikan & Troudi, 2010).

In fact, millennials in Singapore spend almost 3.4 hours a day on their mobile phones and thus there is a huge amount of time that young adults are immersed in some form of information seeking(New Straits Times, 2015). Furthermore, with about 67% of the population being Internet users, of which more than 50% are users of social media (Statista, 2016), Social media-linked technologies are expected to play a pivotal role in realising learning in the case of higher education. Universities in Singapore, like SUSS implements blended learning, while instructors are utilising YouTube and Facebook to complement their traditional teaching approaches. Students responded to this shift by also increasing the use of YouTube to learn, however, there is little in way of formal research elucidating the effectiveness of YouTube for learning/teaching purposes.

Results

The data was transcribed manually and analyzed thematically, guided by keywords used in the grounded theory approach. New codes were formed based on the analysis. After the initial coding, the transcripts, thematically-coded remarks, and results were reviewed by a fellow colleague who is also teaching the same module at the University. The main themes were the advantages of blended learning, purpose of social media use, and its positive and negative effects on academic performance, the effectiveness and the problems of using YouTube for learning.

The students identified that with blended learning, there is flexibility of being able to complete assignments at any place/ any time, convenience of not having to come to campus as often, and the benefits of the online component. There is learning at one's own pace and the study units online allow for theoretical understanding when job responsibilities and other commitments make it difficult to attend all the face-to-face in-classes except when possible. The problems and issues with blended learning is that learning makes lectures redundant as all information is online, there is less interactive/lack of direct communications with lecturers online; time lapse in communication. There is also the lack of in-depth knowledge, only superficial learning just from the study online materials and they lacking the "human' element and relation to real life scenarios unlike some situated examples shared by lecturer in class. Finally, the technical issues of technical glitches and that of connectivity problem.

The data also revealed that all the students use YouTube for entertainment and relaxation. At least ten of them pointed out that they use YouTube to relieve stress. One of them said that "It is …for me to relieve stress after studying", while another indicated "It helps me a lot in my studies...". They regarded YouTube as an

entertainment tool: "It releases tension and help me pass time" "When I have free time, I tend to visit YouTube".

Almost all of the respondents watched the videos for information and educational purposes and for social purposes of keeping with trends, knowing what is around the world and be updated with latest development and technology. Interestingly, they would use social media, such as YouTube every day.

Students are not just using YouTube for learning, but to solve non-academic problems such as "I use YouTube for tutorials with step-by-step instructions to perform certain tasks and how to troubleshoot problems". And to "...learn cooking from YouTube too". Many of them mentioned that YouTube helps them solve academic problems and increase their knowledge "I watch many academic-oriented videos on YouTube. It helps me learn and understand and inspire me to come up with creative and useful ideas". "I use YouTube for a lot of work-related problems, as it provides tutorials with step-by-step instructions on how to perform certain tasks and how to troubleshoot problems". "I learn tutorials on management and communication modules" and "I watched a video on YouTube to understand accountancy topics that I could not understand from the textbook and lecture notes. These videos helped me learn effectively, and I am now more knowledgeable than my classmates".

They are convinced that learning from YouTube is easier and fun, and its heavily visual content makes it easier to understand the message(s) it is trying to convey, "YouTube is attractive to me because videos are more interesting than words".

One of them pointed out that "It is beneficial to understand a theory that can be explained by a video; it has a positive effect on learning because the course requires more in-depth explanation". They believed that using video help them understand difficult topics, "I use YouTube to help me with my studies, and before every exam, I use YouTube for revision because I do not understand some of my instructors in class".

The last theme is that of the difficulties and issues such as fake or false information and news online, distractions with games and other social events and postings and that of superficial social learning only with the use of YouTube. However, they emphasized that social media, particularly YouTube can complement and supplement formal learning provided the teachers and lecturers were to incorporate it during lesson time.

Discussion

These results confirm that using videos to teach have a prolific positive effect on students' learning for higher education students that YouTube grants the students satisfaction due to the use of videos in a traditional classroom setting (Torres-Ramírez et al., 2014). Students reported higher satisfaction and increased retention when social media is integrated into their courses (Alon & Herath, 2014).

According to Clifton and Mann (2011), the use of YouTube videos almost guarantees increased student engagement, critical consciousness, and accelerated in-depth learning. These findings are consistent with those reported that YouTube videos will

simplify the understanding of a topic to improve the students' attention and retention due to the fact that it is much easier to remember visual cues than auditory ones (Johnson & Mayer, 2009). Alon and Herath (2014) reported similar findings and argued that students believe that they learn more and are more satisfied with a course integrated with social media. The results of this study are beneficial for academia and academic institutions, since it creates knowledge pertaining to students' usage of YouTube for learning and students' perception towards the effectiveness of video for learning purposes. The results highlighted the importance of blended learning and using complementary tools to improve traditional learning approaches. Many universities are invested in traditional methods of teaching using books and lecture notes. Increasing the use of social media amongst students and facilities that these technologies provide for learning creates the opportunity for educators and universities to redesign the teaching method and facilitate the usage of these technologies for teaching and learning within a blended learning context.

From the results, hence, there is need to design participatory & collaborative activities with the school curriculum and to engage students with creating and participating in activities using YouTube videos for learning and assessments. YouTube Resources for both teaching and learning and to promote active learners with educator's interactions and feedback too.

The results also confirmed the effectiveness of YouTube video on students' learning and highlighted the fact that traditional teaching methods need to be improved. Thus, there can be good incorporation of social media, YouTube as tools of learning within a blended learning context. The following diagram explains the details between Face to Face interactions with educators/tutors in class followed by online spaces with the use of social media, such as YouTube.

	Tutor	Student	Resources	Feedback
F2F	Lecture on product design.	Take notes	Greirson (2003)	
Work-space	Make sure students can access workspace	Access task and resources Assign roles to team members	Series of online articles and simulations	From tutor and other students
F2F	Task students: upload the resources sourced Information literacy workshop	Learn information literacy skills		From tutor, peers and librarian
Work-space	Monitor student progress	Upload resources View resources uploaded by others	Uploaded resources shared across groups	Feedback from tutor, peers
F2F	Students present final concept	Group presentation		Peers and tutor

Figure 1: Strategies for Blended Learning with Social Media
Conclusion

This study elucidated that the uses of social media, like YouTube is well liked, effectively used for collaborative learning amongst university students and their perception on its effectiveness for teaching and learning. The results confirmed that many students rely on YouTube to solve academic problems and answer any questions that are beyond the boundaries of the textbook book and formal learning in class. Almost all of the students use YouTube to seek information and learn. The extensive use of social amongst students, their familiarity with it, and the effectiveness of videos for learning makes it necessary that suitable technologies be adopted for teaching and educational methods be redesigned and also within a blended learning context. Thus, there can be better leveraging of these tools for learning. New technologies/channel can be used as a complementary tool for the education system, which will eliminate the weaknesses of traditional pedagogies and enhance teaching and learning. Using visual objects, especially YouTube videos to explain something will make it easier for students to visualize and understand the topic much better and in- depth learning. Thus, with the use of social media, like YouTube as a tool, students move from being informed to an active learner and self-directed learner of their own, hence an empowerment of learning from information.

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