

# Use of Online Social Networking and Academic Performance of Students

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## INTRODUCTION

Online social networking (OSN) is an online application that has grown rapidly in prevalence and popularity in recent years. Millions of Malaysian youngsters, teenagers, students (either at school, college or university's level) use OSN websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Friendster and LinkedIn every day. Besides, Malaysian higher education also has adopted OSN on a wider scale and young Malaysians are very active users of OSN (Zakaria, Watson, & Edwards, 2010). In other words, the use of online social network has become necessary among younger generation.

The emergence of online social network has become a major trend over the years with growing popularity amongst the younger generation (Onuoha & Saheed, 2011). When online social networking becomes more popular, literature, however, suggests that there is an ongoing debate on the role of online social networks in the academic performance of users.

This article synthesizes the literature review concerning use of OSN in school, college and university, and academic performance of students. It offers definitions of OSN, followed by the status of current knowledge about the use of OSN and academic performance of students. Based on the secondary sources, it concludes the entry with recommendations for future research direction on the relationship between use of OSN and academic performance.

## BACKGROUND

Online social networking sites (OSNs) are websites that give users a range of services based on web technologies that allow individuals to build a public or semi

public profile with relationships system, have a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and finally, view and navigate through the list of users' connections with those who share a connection in the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

OSNs are also defined as a range of activities enabled by social technologies or social media tools include blog, microblog, wiki, social networking site, video sharing site and online discussion board or forum, and operationalized by a group of people (Hamid et al., 2009). It enables users to socialize and create networks online. Examples of OSNs that are used on a regular basis by millions of people nowadays are Facebook, Twitters, MySpace, Friendster, Youtube and Skype. In Malaysia, social interaction in cyberspace by using social networking has been adapted by many people and has changed their communication (Mustafa & Hamzah, 2011).

We define online social networking as the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a public or private profile to interact with people in their networks, share their profile information, communicate with others, and share data and information within that system.

The social technologies can support interaction among students by allowing them to actively participate in a discussion. The students can work collaboratively in an online social environment to solve problems with their peers, or to organize social events. The collaborative production's principle embedded in social technologies enable learners and teachers to share and publish artifacts produced as a result of the learning activity (for example, course materials such as course syllabus, course notes and assignments). In this regard, the use of social technologies has changed the demand of education.

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Online social networking can be classified into five categories (Fraser & Dutta, 2008), namely, (i) egocentric networks - act as a platform to build a network of friends; (ii) web communities - collecting members with identity ties based on interest, gender, race, nation, religion and others; (iii) opportunistic web – the members gathered for business purpose or professional relationship using OSN site such as LinkedIn; (iv) passion-centric network – gathered people who share interests or hobbies (communities of interest); and (v) media-sharing site – this site is defined based on its contents (such as Youtube for those who want to share videos).

Students are increasingly using these social networks for friends' news feeds, personal updates, events and activities, notes, and messages. According to Michael, Robyn and Kate (2013) the widespread use of media among college students from texting to chatting on cell phones to posting status updates on Facebook may be taking an academic toll. They found media use, in general, was associated with lower grade point averages (GPAs) and other negative academic outcomes. Thus, this has led to a rise of below question:

*Can the extensive use of OSNs in the younger generation affect students' academic performance?*

The issue of whether OSN give positive or negative impact on students' academic performance is often dependent on the larger issues identified with the overall use of OSN sites such as individual self-discipline and self-regulation (behavior in terms of time spent on- and off-line), psychological effects and user adaptability (Egedegbe, 2013).

## STUDENTS' PRACTICES OF OSN AND BEHAVIOR

The most used features by OSNs users are: uploading and sharing photos and videos, comments on other profiles, friends and private messages between users. In this context, users of OSN sites also share a number of documents, and interact and communicate with each other. What makes the OSNs unique, not because they allow students or users to meet others in the network, but because they make possible for students to manage

and make visible their own social network (Fardoun et al., 2012).

The teenagers and youth especially students have embraced online social networking as one method to connect with their friends, share information and showcase their social lives (egedegbe, 2013). In general, the students spend a lot of time on OSN sites creating their profile, doing research concerning their academic assignments or works, chatting with friends and posting pictures of event they attended. Young et al. (2009) found that students keen on interacting with others in order to exchange information about their interests, to discuss about interesting or new topics and follow news about certain topics on OSN sites.

## USE OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Online social networking can be regarded as a platform allowing teachers and students to communicate and collaborate on school subjects and projects outside the classroom (Khedo et al., 2012). According to Khedo et al., teachers can post school related works on these online communities and students can enrich their learning experiences by teaming up with their classmates to work on assignments and projects. These networks can also go beyond the classroom walls by uniting multiple classrooms from different schools, thus creating a richer environment for collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Hamid et al. (2011) have investigated the impacts of the use of OSN on enhancing student engagement and interaction from the students' perspectives. Their findings revealed that students showed positive inclination towards the use of OSN in facilitating their learning. The OSN benefited the students in enhancing their engagement and interaction, in promoting critical thinking, discovering new knowledge, tracking their own learning progress and being a platform to be more vocal.

In general, benefits of OSN use for students' education purpose among others are as follows:

1. The use of OSN has significant potential to support and enhance in-class teaching and learning (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Techehaimanot & Hickman; 2010; Kabilan et al., 2010).

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