

Creative Arts Students' Use of Social Media: Perspectives of Educators

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Abstract

The emergence of social media has made a tremendous change on lifestyle and communication practices in our society. Majority of the internet users today are hooked with social network sites in staying connected with people around the globe. New digital technologies and the social media also constantly change, changing communication and interaction between educators and learners. Social media enables the students and educators to be connected as it permits them to communicate on social media apart from the classroom setting. This paper explores the connections of educators and their students through social media as well as the perspectives of

educators on the use of social media by creative arts students, specifically in managing, learning and sharing information, and also problem solving. The finding of this study is collected through interview sessions with nine creative arts educators from public and private universities and colleges. While the majority of the respondents were very positive on students use of social media, they also expressed their concerns. Educators have different views and arguments on the pros and cons for creative arts students to share their creative projects on social media. Some of the educators are also concerned whether students are able to manage references and resources found. The challenges of creative arts students on managing information and resources related to their creative projects is discussed.

Keywords: *Educator, Creative Art Students, Social Media, Learning and Sharing, Problem Solving*

1. Introduction

Social media has made a tremendous change on lifestyle and communication practices in our society. Majority of internet users today are hooked with social network sites to staying connected with people around the globe (Baruah, 2012; Lewis, 2010). Social network sites also facilitate interaction such as communication, collaboration, sharing and learning regardless of the geographical distance between users. (Redecker, Ala-Mutka, Punie, 2010; Naeema H. Jabr & Oman, 2011; Correa, Hinsley & Homero Gil de Zuniga, 2010; Guy, 2012) It is a platform where the users can make their own decisions to choose with whom, when and how they would like to interact.

Higher-education sector has given the rise of Web 2.0 technologies has been looking into the individual competency from a variety of perspectives (Goodfellow, 2011). Students are now highly connected to the internet and many studies have been carried out to examine the adoption of social media in the academic context (Staines & Lauchs, 2013; Stoeckel & Sinkinson, 2013; Al-Rahmi & Mohd. Shahizan Othman, 2013). Apart from looking into the usage pattern of the students, researchers also focus into the use of social media by educators, education institutions, education stakeholders and others, given that social media is a platform for various educational related activities such as discussion, learning, problem solving and information searching outside the classes (Al-Rahmi & Mohd. Shahizan Othman, 2013). Nowadays, social media is no longer integrated to only daily life activities, it is widely use among the learners and educators in the education field. (Baruah, 2012) Suraya Hamid, Waycott, J., Chang, S. and Sherah Kurnia (2011) argue that social technologies used in educational field have changed the demands and direction of higher education. Recent studies show that social media platforms are embraced by business, the creative arts and other fields. (Staines&Lauchs, 2013) In the arts context, social media has impact on: (i) helping to bring and match audiences with performances and artworks which they are looking for, (ii) providing a platform to art content generation following with discussions around the interested groups, and (iii) getting comments and building arts awareness among the public. (Poole & Sophie Le-Phat Ho, 2011) There are many studies that have explored the use of social media by students in higher education institutions, but there

is no adequate research on creative arts students that explores the use of social media for creative arts learning and creative artwork development. This paper offers selected findings at a bigger project that delves on creative arts students use social media.

2. Literature Review

There are several models that can examine digital competencies in social media practices. Researchers have different views and definition on the concept of digital literacy, however majority of their studies relate to knowledge, skills and attitude. Glistler (1997) insisted that the ability and interpreting the information involve basic thinking skills and core competences, without that, a person could not perform tasks effectively in an interactive environment.

The term of digital literacy now includes many sets of specific skills and competencies needed for searching, finding, evaluating and handling information in computerised form (Shopova, 2014). Martin, (Shopova, 2014) stated that digital literacy is a framework for integrating various other illiteracies and skill-sets, though it does not need to encompass them all.

The model offered by Ala-Mutka (2011) is important and instructive to the present study as it centers on the aspects and elements of digital competence. Ala-Mutka proposed a conceptual model of digital competence which covers three main areas:

1. Instrumental knowledge and skills for operational and medium related media usage
2. Advanced skills and knowledge for communication and collaboration, information management, learning and problem solving and meaningful participation.
3. Strategic skills for attitudes that foster intercultural, critical, creative, responsible and autonomous involvement.

Ala-Mutka model highlighted three main areas that included: (i) Instrumental skills and knowledge, (ii) Advanced skills and knowledge, and (iii) Strategic skills for attitude. This model is helpful in looking into the elements and aspects of digital competency among the creative arts students. However, only selected findings from the whole research are offered in this discussion.

In this paper, findings on perspective of educators on advanced skills and knowledge is presented.

3. Project Design

This paper explores the connections of educators and their students through social media as well as looking at the perspectives of educators on the use of social media by creative arts students, specifically in managing, learning and sharing information, and also problem solving. The finding of this study is collected through discussion sessions with nine creative arts educators from public and private universities and colleges. The fieldwork of data collection was carried out between October 2013 to July 2014

4. Findings

4.1 *Communication and Collaboration*

In general, most of the creative arts educators are connected with their students on social media. The students form numerous social media groups for learning purpose and the educators are invited to join them. There are also institutions and lecturers who stated it is compulsory for students to be connected with them on social media. Social media enables educators to get in touch with their students easily. Compared to email, creative arts educators also stated social media allows communication with their students more efficiently in terms of time when they are out of the classroom. Some of the students communicate and discuss more actively on social media; they share their work, ideas and views with their educators and peers more comfortably compared to when they are in the class. Based on the discussion with educators, one of the reasons is that students do not have much concern on the structure of their language used when they communicate on social media. However, it is also a communication barrier for students who are not that good in English as they have difficulties in understanding some of the feedback given by educators especially those that involve technical terms. Apart from communication, social media is also a place where educators share information and knowledge with their students. One of the educators stated:

Apart from face to face lecture, we have a 100% interaction on social media. All of our students need to have a Facebook account which is connected with our institution. From there, we upload and update them on lots of thing. Sharing of information of events, sometimes we inform them about class rescheduled by using Facebook.

Another educator noted the following:

Let me tell you, the response is spontaneous. If you send them an email, not necessarily they will check. But I can tell you for sure they are there on Facebook everyday... It is so easy to get connected to them I think it is better than their interaction in class. Sometimes when they are in class, lecturer and students, there are still some gaps when we meet face-to-face in class. They are very comfortable to tell what they wanted to tell on Facebook. Telling out their ideas.

There are educators who think that social media is not only a place for lecturers to share knowledge with their students as they believe the students also bear the responsibility to find and share information and knowledge with their coursemates there. It is a way for the students to collaborate and help each other in their learning process. Though, the communication between educators and students are very positive, still the respondents think that it cannot fully replace face-to-face interaction for creative teaching and learning purposes. One of the educators stated:

I started using Facebook to connected with my final year students since 2010. They have their own Facebook group also so that they can communicate with

each others... I told them, no one get behind, so let's say when you are searching for your own project's information, you found out some information that is related to what your friend is doing, they know that because we always have group meeting. So if you have information which will be able to help your friend, then you post it on Facebook.

Educators think that social media is a good platform for students to be connected with more people who will be helpful in their project. They think that social media provides an opportunity for them to meet with: potential employee, international and local people who can help to inspire them in their creative project, for instance, professional group could provide professional feedback and views for their creative work. One of the respondents commented as below:

I feel that it will also help them in getting the job. I heard that nowadays when the company is recruiting, they also look into their Facebook and see how... what kind of ideas, how he or she communicate with people, what kind of person he or she is... by connecting to their social media. ... it is a best point that you are connected with more people and they might be able to help you in your projects, quickly get ideas or inputs from all around the world. Again, it depends on how we utilise it.

Educators also feel that social media has the potential to create creative partnership and getting chances of collaboration with different people. However, they found most of their students not taking the advantage of using social media to broaden their connection for creative purpose. According to educators, this is depends on the students personal initiative. Majority of the students are using social media for socialiasation and their connection is mostly limited to their own friends and coursemates. Therefore, sharing of their creative work on social media is also limited to only friends and coursemates. Some of the educators claimed that there are minority of students who had shared their work on social media and look forward to get feedback from their contact but was not successful. This is because they are lack of skill in clarifying their question and choosing the right site to post their work for getting feedback. One of the respondents stated:

...it might be sometimes, when you put it up there, the international audience could not relate to it. The other reason is they put it in the wrong platform. Students themselves, they put it on a wrong site that is not active or because of other reasons. Also, probably because the students does not make it clear, and people feel that it is not relevant and not knowing what are you getting for. Some they just put it there and not even putting up a question. So what? ...The students need that skill actually. Skill to be able to ask the right question.

4.2 Information Management

All of the creative arts educators share information, resources and knowledge with their students from time to time. On social media, they usually send links for reading materials and creative references. Educators have different suggestions for their

students in getting information and resources. Some of them think that traditional references like books, magazines are equally important as references on the internet and social media. Some think students should get references and information from the internet as it provides the latest information and resources especially for creative artwork. One of the educators claimed, creative arts involves trend which is happening currently. Students should not wait for the publication of reference books which will always take longer time to be printed and delivered compare to the internet. There are also educators who pointed out students must be clear with their purpose and should be able to decide where and how they are going to apply the information and resources obtained. For example, if the information is for assignment and academic paper writing, then it is better for them to get references from books, journals and academic websites. For creative artwork development, the educators suggest the students to browse through the internet for references and information. Nevertheless, few educators noted most of the students today think library is a boring place for searching information and resources. The internet is always their first option to look for information. Reading materials like books and academic articles are not popular among the students. All of the educators agree that in order to get more and latest information which is related to the creative field, the students need more exposure by participating in events like exhibitions, seminars and talks. Apart from that, they have to read and watch more. Respondents commented as below:

Sometimes we will suggest them to go to the library, but for them, library is something boring. So usually they won't go and rather going to the internet. Apart from that, taking them for industrial talk is also important. For example, talk by the professionals from the industry.

I like to encourage them to go to the library. Get books, they should make it cross disciplinary, even though they are arts students, but still they have to look into books which are related to architecture, make it cross discipline. Besides, I also encourage them to look for online reference. Observation is also very important for creative students.

While the internet has become part of an important tool for learning, educators also are concern about the reliability of information circulated on social media. Respondents mentioned the information over floats on the internet and this poses a problem in which it will make it difficult for the user to judge if the information found, specifically whether the information is reliable or not especially on the social media as everyone can share anything online. One of the educators found her students were sharing a lot of information regardless of knowing where the source is from and without knowing if the information shared is reliable. Respondents feel that the creative students have to be able to differentiate what is true and what is not unless if they are only looking at the images of certain artwork. However, it is a must for the students to make sure that the information and resources they are going to use are the reliable ones. Respondents suggested students to do a cross reference check for information found on the internet and social media. The students are encouraged to get and compare information from

different resources like books, internet, journals instead of only looking for information from the internet and believe whatever they come across on the social media. Even if the students are looking for information on the internet, educators also encourage them to use different search engines and compare the information found on few different websites. Information management skill is highly needed by the students according to the educators.

The research findings also show educators believe that students have only minor linkage with the creative industry and academics. One of the educators suggested the institutions provide more chances for the students to be involved in actual projects that are organised by the industry so they could strengthen their linkages with the industry. Some of the students do have creative partnership by taking part in creative events for creative contribution as well as doing cross-disciplinary projects with their friends from different field. As for the linkages with academic, some of the students are connected with students who are studying the same major with them from different institutions and they can share some learning and creative arts information among themselves. There are also a small number of students who are following the social media of lecturers from other institutions to get some information for creative arts through their sharing.

In overall, majority of the educators agreed that most of the students highly depending on the internet and social media to obtain information, however their skill in managing information that they found from social media is still very low. They hardly filter and show critical thinking on information found. Based on the observation of several educators, they found the problem is partly caused by students' attitudes. Students do not put in effort to understand the information found. There are students who just 'copy and paste' or 'do minor modification' on the information found for their assignments. This has caused another problem which is plagiarism in institutions of higher learning. Educators have come out with suggestions to solve this problem: (i) students should not do last minute work so that they will have enough time to search for information, filter, and understand the content, (ii) students need to be trained to manage and think critically for the information found on social media at the early stage.

4.3 Learning and Problem Solving

Majority of the creative arts students are found connected with their lecturers on social media. Educators stated they post materials for learning to share with their students. However for most of the time, students are connected to their educators to seek for solutions and assistance through social media.

Educators believe there are pros and cons for connecting with the students on the social media. The social media is convenient for both parties to be in touch with each other at their convenience regardless of distance. Nevertheless, it makes teaching and learning more efficient through interaction and discussion on social media. One of the educators mentioned, the interaction and discussion on social media helped him to share

more materials and had enabled him to gauge the level of understanding of his students better. Social media provides better platform for these two parties to 'meet' and discuss anytime and anywhere compared to just meet each other once a week in the class. Some of the students will also post their creative artworks on social media and educators are able to give explanation, guidance, and feedback. There are also students who shared information that they came across on social media and ask for the educators' view. As mentioned earlier, there are students who feel more comfortable to communicate with their lecturers on social media rather than in person. Therefore, they will post questions to their lecturers here instead of asking in class.

Educators think that connection between students and educators through social media for learning purpose should be encouraged with few conditions of course. Educators believe students should learn to respect educators' personal time and not to expect immediate feedback from them. There are also students who were found not focusing during lecture and raise their questions related to what has been explained in class to their educators through social media. Educators are also concern on the misinterpretation of their feedback on social media by the students; students who are weak in English might have problems in understanding what the educators trying to convey. Some of the educators believe that it is easier for them to explain by demonstrating it to their students for problems that involve technical issues. One of the educators commented as below:

I feel that yes, we should encourage this. This is a more efficient way. However, there is a problem here. When I write this sentence on the social media, your understanding on what I have wrote might be different. If I responses to them in English and their English is not so good, then there might be miscommunication. That might be the problem.

Educators consider social media to be helpful and effective for learning and problem solving as long as the students use it the correct way. This will help in extending their knowledge. However, they also emphasise that not all the problems can be solved through social media. Social media can be an assisting tool for teaching and guiding the students. Educators highlighted on the importance of their role in giving guidance to students for verifying the information and sources that they come across on social media in a critical manner. Unfortunately, most of the students do not have the ability in doing so.

4.4 Meaningful Participation

Through the observation of educators, most of their students participate actively on social media. Nevertheless, most of them only involve actively in social chat, giving and receiving comments which are non-academic related. The students like to share things that are mostly related to their personal life. One of the educators pointed out, students are using the social media as a platform to express their personal views and feeling, but sad to say most of the expressions are the negative ones. Another educator

stated, students are just hooked on the social media without any specific objective. However, few educators found there are some students who uploaded the public service announcement videos that they produced. Educators believe that this act will attract attention and create awareness as well as benefit the other users, hence the society.

Other respondents also claimed that participation of creative arts students in groups, sharing links of information related to the projects they are working on and their participation in discussion with other users will also help and benefit each others in terms of gaining new knowledge or increase understanding. Furthermore, some educators also mentioned that there are some cases where the students shared their feedback, links etc. online had helped other students to further improve their creative artwork. One of the respondents commented:

Sharing of creative work, commenting on the work of your friends or others. If everyone is sharing their thought, then it gives you a room to discuss what you feel, it will also enrich your knowledge and this is a good platform for learning and creating awareness as well.

Educators have different views on students' social media participation in providing them better chance to compete in the industry. Few of the educators feel that if the students are connected to the right person, especially those professionals in the industry or friends who are able to provide them helpful feedback and information, that will help them to improve and be more competitive in the industry. One of the educators claimed it is important for the creative students to manage their social media professionally as that will reflect their personality, behavior and characteristics to people whom they are connected with. Another important factor is how the students manage their portfolio on the social media. Educators found that majority of the students are lack of skills in managing their online portfolio. One of the educators believed that failing to do so would cause the students to miss the opportunity in securing a job. However, findings also show that there are students who do not have any industry connection, it is impossible for them to expose themselves to the industry. Few educators feel that there are other better platforms for students to be more outstanding and provide better chance for job opportunity. Developing a personal website or blog which shows your creative artworks, participating in exhibitions and competition are part of the suggestions given. Educators emphasise the importance for students in making sure their artwork to achieve a certain level of quality before they upload them on social media.

5. Discussion

The collected data revealed that educators and creative arts students are connected on social media for learning and teaching. Social media is a platform that is convenient for both, educators and students to get in touch and interact at anytime and anywhere. It provide a space for students who do not feel comfortable to interact and discuss with their lecturers face-to-face. Apart from that, social media is also a medium which has potential for students to reach out for helpful comments and feedback for their creative

learning and projects. However, data also revealed that not many creative arts students benefit from this as they are lack of skills in communication.

In relation to information management, both educators and students take parts in sharing information and resources of creative subject on social media for discussion and knowledge improvement. Data shows that internet is now the first choice of creative arts students to look for information and resources. There are both pros and cons for traditional references and information and resources from social media. Traditional references like books, newspapers, journals, and magazines might provide information that is more reliable however it could be outdated due to the time spent for it to be published. Information and resources spread fast on the social media, but the reliability is sometimes questionable. Problems might occur when students apply the information and resources found on the creative projects or assignments as students were said to be lacking of critical and information management skill. Besides, their linkage with other parties such as the industry and stakeholders are also less and that would also cause the lack of alternative information and resources. Students are suggested to participate in more events and activities as educators in the creative field think that information and knowledge for creative arts can be enhanced through active participation.

Even though the students are connected with their educators on social media, the use of social media for problem solving is slightly higher than learning. Social media is a good platform for extension of activities after lecture. Students can have follow up discussion with their educators on creative learning and projects development. In addition, educators can also give guidance and their views on the students work. However, there is a barrier for students who are weak in English as they face communication problem while using social media for learning and problem solving. Meanwhile, educators also face problem when it comes to students' expectations to get prompt response from them. Apart from that, data also show that technical problems that faced by creative students is better to be solve in face-to-face basis.

Students nowadays are actively participated on social media, yet their pattern of participation is focusing more on their social life. Only a very small number of students posted and shared things which benefits the society. In terms of learning, most of them involve in sharing information and discussion with their educators and peer. They helped each other in project development by sharing their views. Since students are lack of skill in managing their portfolio on social media, there is potential risk when the industry people look them up on social media. In order to stand a better chance to compete in the field and getting a job, the students need to be organised and make their social media looks professional.

Overall, the social media is helpful to a certain extend in teaching and learning in creative arts. The study has stressed the potential of social media as an assisting tool from learning to getting a job for creative arts students. There is a need of discussion

on how to improve the advance skills and knowledge of these students from just being digital competent but to also give benefits to others.

6. Conclusion

The influence of students in technology will influence the outcomes of their results (Kannan Rassiah, Parahsakthi Chidambaram and Haeryip Sihombing, 2011). This study shows that students are connected on social media for learning purpose. However, the limitation of the creative arts students connection has reduced the benefit they can get through the social media. Majority of the students are only getting views and feedback from their own lecturers, friends and coursemates.

While the internet is the first choice tool of students to look for information, their information management skills needs to be improved. Internet allows students to gain a lot of information, however students are not able to relate and apply the information found in their project and assignment due to lack of skill in managing and analysing.

Social media allows students to learn and get solution for problem solving from their connections. Educators encourage students to use this tool to connect with them for learning and problem solving but at the same time, they feel by doing so, they have less privacy and free time. Students also face the problem of language barrier when they use social media for problem solving. Therefore, face-to-face interaction still plays an important role between educators and students for teaching and learning.

Even though, students benefit by using social media in their learning, their participation in terms of contribution to the society and other users is still low. Social media is a platform to showcase students' creative work and their skills to a bigger group of audience. Thus, due to lack of skill in managing their own social media page and portfolios will not make the students to appear outstanding and be competitive in the industry.

As a conclusion, this study shows that social media is a potential tool for creative learning as well as increasing the exposure of creative arts students to possible employment.

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