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Exploitation of social media among university students: A case study

[Farzana Shafique](#)

Lecturer, Department of Library & Information Science, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. E-mail: alakhdarem2001 (at) yahoo.com

[Mushahid Anwar](#)

PhD, Head, Geography Department, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. E-mail: mushahid.anwar (at) gmail.com

[Mahe Bushra](#)

Lecturer, Department of Library & Information Science, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. E-mail: mahebushra (at) yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study aimed at finding the trend of social media usage among the students of the [Islamia University of Bahawalpur \(IUB\)](#). For this purpose a sample of final year students was taken from the Geography Department. A questionnaire survey was administered to get the response from the students. The questionnaire was containing both open and close ended questions. The responses show that many social media websites such as CiteULike, Technorati, Connotea, Blogger, Twitter and Wikis etc. were frequently used by the responded students for communication, research work, online learning and making social contacts. It was also found that they have good IT skills and sophisticated tools and good Internet connections available to them so they do not encounter any problems in accessing these sites. Although this survey is restricted to a group of Geography students of IUB, the data obtained provide some insights into how students in Pakistan have been using the social media for both formal and informal types of learning and communication. In general, the acceptance by Pakistani students towards the use of social media for learning seems positive. It is hoped that the findings described here will help build a foundation for future investigations in Pakistan related to social media.

Keywords

Social media; Social networks; Web 2.0; University students; The Islamia University of Bahawalpur; Pakistan

Introduction

Since its inception, social media has attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. There are hundreds of Social media websites, with various technological tools, supporting a wide range of interests and

practices. These websites are becoming popular among students and professionals and help them in connecting with each other, their local and the global community at large. A tremendous increase in the use of these websites in Pakistan has also been observed but yet no study has been conducted for assessing the use of these social media among young university students. Keeping the assumption of increasing use of social media in Pakistan in view, this study aims at finding the trend of social media usage among students of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB).

Background of the Study

Over the past six years there has been an increasing interest in the new generation of web-based technologies, tools and services offered by social media. This Social media, popularly known as Web 2.0 is becoming a central topic in our information world. The concept was coined officially by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty. Social media is a place where everyone can add or edit information. It is a web where digital tools allow users to create, change and publish dynamic content ([Aharony, 2008](#)). According to [O'Reilly \(2005\)](#), it can be defined as "the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; social media applications are those that make the most of the built-in advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an 'architecture of participation,' and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences". [Boyd and Ellison \(2007\)](#) have used the term social network sites and defined it as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

There are many social media applications available for use, such as blogs, wikis, RSS Feeds, List serves, IM, multimedia files sharing networks etc. The blogs are new and easy process of publishing the ideas on the web and to get the comments from other web surfers. IM is available through browsers from most of service providers. RSS helps users to bring the updates and feeds from other websites. It is a very simple tool to bring the latest stories, updates from news groups, magazines, journals and blogs. Flickr, an online image sharing application, is a popular source of sharing different events with the help of images and image sets. It allows users to upload, share and tag images by keywords. These tags are very useful for retrieving relevant images. Wikis, another example of social media for the publication of collaborative creative contents, allows multiple users from all over the world to build a knowledge base by using this application. Wikis are the mix of many other technologies like messaging, blogging, streaming media, and tagging. Similarly, YouTube, which offers a platform for sharing video clips made by users, provides an Application Programming Interface (API) so that users can access video clips from other websites. In general these APIs allow users to mash up one or more Web 2.0 services in order to create their own composite value-added services ([Angus, Thelwall, & Stuart, 2008](#); [Davison-Turley, 2005](#); [Floyd, Jones, Rathi, & Twidale, 2007](#); [Maness, 2006](#)).

In recent years, social media such as Facebook, Myspace, Flickr and Youtube have become popular particularly with young students. These tools have become part of the students' lives and help to build their connections with others. These connections are based on related interests, work, interactions and personal relationships. Consequently, academic institutions have realized the importance of social media and a growing number of academic communities are creating accounts and joining groups through these sites ([Al-Daihani, 2010](#)). The reasonable use of these social media was traced even in 2006 when

the Pew Internet Project, a non-profit research center that examines the social impact of the Internet, conducted a survey by telephone among a national sample of 935 youths aged 12 to 17 and found that more than half (55%) of all online American youths use online social networking sites. Of the teens in the survey, 85% were using MySpace while 7% were using Facebook ([Pew Internet and American Life Project](#), 2009). Recent surveys from Pew provide insight on social media usage among teens and young adults. The 37-page report highlights the attitudes and behaviors of people 18 to 29 years old ([Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), 2010).

In-fact, these popular social media applications have revolutionized our lives. Experts believe that these applications support developmental approaches to learning and have a great potential to online learning ([Virkus](#), 2008). In formal education, this media provides us wide space of communication in which it is easier to create web based learning zone. With social media educators can now much more readily connect their students not just to their own localities, their places of learning, and to each other, but also to a huge and ever expanding diversity of social, cultural, political networks and therefore to multiple ways of being knowing and communicating ([Eijkman](#), 2009).

Keeping this reality in view, researchers in academic and professional institutions have studied the use of these social media applications among students in recent years. A review of literature reveals that these emerging technologies are increasingly being implemented in academic institutions and may have a major effect on existing teaching and learning practices. For example, [Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, and Espinoza](#) (2008) reported the findings of a study aimed at understanding the role of social networking sites in college students' lives. They analyzed basic trends in participants' use of such sites, their typical activities on them, and their reasons for using them. They found that majority of the participants in their sample reported having a profile on a social networking site (78%). Less common was the use of instant messaging programs such as AIM, and only 56% reported using them. There were no ethnic or religious group differences with regard to using instant messaging, having a social networking site profile, and the kind of social networking site (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, or Xanga) used and updated most frequently. Eighty-eight percent of social networking site users reported that the profile that they updated the most often was on MySpace, 8% reported that it was on Facebook, 1% reported that it was on Xanga, YouTube, and other sites. The number of profiles reported by the social networking site users ranged from one through six ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 1.05$) with the majority (61%) reporting having only one profile. Of the participants with a social networking site profile, most were daily users (57%). Similarly, [Zakaria, Watson, and Edwards](#) (2010) studied the use of social media by Malaysian students. They found that students have been using the Internet applications specifically social media for both formal and informal types of learning. The general opinion gathered about the integration of social media tools into learning is positive although some degree of inexperience and hesitancy was noted in particular tools. Students also appear to be passive in the context of content construction but they regularly obtain or download information. The data analyzed raised hope that social media implementation in Malaysia may yield similar benefits with their other counterparts from different countries. In addition, further study is required to measure if differences in cultural perspectives can determine students' or teachers' preferences towards the utilization of this tool for learning.

[Zakaria, Watson, and Edwards](#) (2010) believe that social media applications have already being accepted by younger generations as a platform to socialize, collaborate and learn in an informal and flexible manner, although their level of involvement and contribution varies significantly. Similarly, [Virkus](#) (2008) stresses that social media helps promote the benefits of working co-operatively with tools that facilitate the aggregation and organization of knowledge while at the same time demonstrating that the diversity of

individual research interests enhances learning for all. It helps students develop practical research skills that they need in a world where knowledge construction and dissemination make increasing use of online information networks. Thus this social media is suitable for educational and lifelong learning purposes in our knowledge society, because our modern society is built to a large degree on digital environments of work and social communication.

Problem Statement

There are hundreds of Social media websites, with various technological tools, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. These websites are becoming popular among students and professionals and help them in connecting with each other, their local and the global community at large. Numerous efforts have been made particularly to understand the use of social media in education and how it can elevate the quality of learning in higher learning institutions. So far, focus has been placed in developed countries such as the USA, UK and other European countries. However, little has been done in developing countries like Pakistan. On the other hand, a tremendous increase in the use of these websites in Pakistan has also been observed but no study has been conducted so far for assessing the use of social media among university students.

Objectives of the Study

Keeping the gap in assessing the use of social media among young adults and students in view, the study aims:

1. To find out the use of social media by the students of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur;
2. To explore their views about the purpose of its use and trace the problems faced by them; and
3. To furnish the recommendations in this regard.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to find out the use of social media among a small group of university students. The selection of Geography students (final year only) is due to the easy access to the students and increased use of social media in their daily routine observed by the researchers. The data for this study were collected at a single department of Islamia University of Bahawalpur, so the interpretation of the results needs to be used with care. Due to the less diversified group of respondents, the use of inferential statistics was not justified. Future studies can expand the samples to the other departments of the same and other universities even to the general population of Pakistan to examine the impact of diverse demographic characteristics on the exploitation of social media sites.

Materials and Methods

The study is based on questionnaire survey. A questionnaire containing both open and close ended questions was distributed among the students. The population of the study was final year students studying at the Geography Department of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. The total number of students in the final year (Both morning and evening sessions) is 130, whereas 95 students responded to the survey. Thus the response rate was 73%. Gathered responses were analyzed with the help of SPSS (Version-17). Coming section presents the analysis of the collected data.

Results and Discussions

The results show that of the 95 respondents, 75(78.9%) were female and 20(21.1%) were male (Table 1). The high number of female students using the online social media applications matches with the findings of [Tech Crunchies](#) (2008) which claims that in USA more women are getting online than men and this trend is expected to increase in the next few years.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of respondents' gender

Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Female	75	78.9
Male	20	21.1
Total	95	100.0

Use of Social media among Respondents

To assess the general usage pattern of social media among the respondents the frequency of using different well known social media sites, purpose of using these sites and problems on the way were major concerns of this study.

Frequency of Using of Social Media Sites

It is evident from the results that the respondents were frequently using the following social media sites e.g., CiteULike, Technorati, Connotea, Blogger, Twitter, Picassa, Furl, Shelfari, Delicious, Wikis, Flickr, Jumper 2.0, LinkedIn, My space, RSS Feeds, Windows Live Spaces, My Opera, ResearchGATE, Internet Relay Chat, Windows, Live Favorites, LibraryThing, Orkut, Knowledge iN (Mean Values are 4.38, 4.38, 4.36, 4.35, 4.31, 4.29, 4.26, 4.26, 4.22, 4.20, 4.15, 4.09, 4.06, 4.02, 4.00, 3.98, 3.89, 3.82, 3.77, 3.76, 3.72, 3.61, and 3.60 respectively). On the other hand following social media websites were used by them sometimes: Yahoo Directory, Yahoo! Personals, Answer.com, Skype/Google, Yahoo groups, You tube, Google Notebook, Yahoo Answers, Geo TV (online), Google Buzz, Facebook, Google Bookmark, and Google groups (Mean Values are 3.49, 3.41, 3.34, 3.29, 3.27, 3.26, 3.22, 3.15, 3.12, 3.08, 2.99, 2.96, and 2.88 respectively) (See Table 2).

The claim by [Arrington](#) (2005) that 85% of college students use FaceBook is not evident in the above results. Similarly a survey entitled "Adults on social network sites, 2005-2009" also shows different results than the current study. For example, 79% of American adults used the Internet in 2009, up from 67% in 2005 and 46% of online American adults 18 and older use a social networking site like MySpace, Facebook or LinkedIn, up from 8% in February 2005. As of August 2009, Facebook was the most popular online social network for American adults 18 and older. Of adult SNS users: a) 73% have a Facebook account; b) 48% have a MySpace profile; c) 14% have an account on LinkedIn; d) 1% each on Yahoo, YouTube, Tagged, Flickr and Classmates.com; and e) 10-12% are on "other" sites like Bebo, Last.FM, Digg, Blackplanet, Orkut, Hi5 and Match.com ([Pew Internet & American Life Project](#), 2009).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics about the usage frequency of different social media sites by the respondents

Rank	Social Media	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
1.	CiteULike	4.38	5.00	5	1.122
2.	Technorati	4.38	5.00	5	.970
3.	Connotea	4.36	5.00	5	1.120
4.	Blogger	4.35	5.00	5	1.060
5.	Twitter	4.31	5.00	5	1.203
6.	Picassa	4.29	5.00	5	1.009

7.	Furl	4.26	5.00	5	1.103
8.	Shelfari	4.26	5.00	5	1.354
9.	Delicious	4.22	5.00	5	1.231
10.	Wikis	4.20	5.00	5	1.277
11.	Flicker	4.15	5.00	5	1.321
12.	Jumper 2.0	4.09	5.00	5	1.384
13.	LinkedIn	4.06	5.00	5	1.351
14.	My space	4.02	5.00	5	1.337
15.	RSS Feeds	4.00	5.00	5	1.451
16.	Windows Live Spaces	3.98	5.00	5	1.495
17.	My Opera	3.89	5.00	5	1.418
18.	ResearchGATE	3.82	4.00	5	1.360
19.	Internet Relay Chat	3.77	5.00	5	1.476
20.	Windows Live Favorites	3.76	5.00	5	1.542
21.	LibraryThing	3.72	4.00	5	1.404
22.	Orkut	3.61	4.00	5	1.475
23.	Knowledge iN	3.60	5.00	5	1.533
24.	Yahoo Directory	3.49	4.00	5	1.515
25.	Yahoo! Personals	3.41	4.00	5	1.595
26.	Answer.com	3.34	3.00	3 ^a	1.434
27.	Skype/Google	3.29	3.00	5	1.681
28.	Yahoo groups	3.27	3.00	5	1.533
29.	You tube	3.26	3.00	5	1.613
30.	Google Notebook	3.22	3.00	5	1.467
31.	Yahoo Answers	3.15	3.00	5	1.571
32.	Geo TV (online)	3.12	3.00	3	1.328
33.	Google Buzz	3.08	3.00	5	1.492
34.	Facebook	2.99	3.00	3	1.388
35.	Google Bookmark	2.96	3.00	3	1.443
36.	Google groups	2.88	3.00	1 ^a	1.563

Note: 5=Always, 4=Frequently, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never

Purpose of Using the Social Media

The respondents were asked to mention the purpose of using these social media. It was found that most of them were frequently using these media for purchasing, video conferencing, selling, tagging related resources, advertisement, finding social contacts, ranking resources, earning money, finding communities of interest, and for searching resources not otherwise available (Mean values are 3.97, 3.94, 3.93, 3.92, 3.85, 3.82, 3.81, 3.71, 3.64, and 3.58 respectively). On the other hand sometimes they were using these media for making friends, sharing links, online learning, time passing, finding jobs online, news and for leisure/fun/entertainment (Mean values are 3.40, 3.29, 3.28, 3.16, 3.07, 2.87, and 2.79 respectively). The rare use of these media was for communication and research work (mean= 2.46 and 2.18). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3. The findings of this study regarding the purpose of using social media to some extent correlate with the findings of [Cha](#) (2010). For example, Cha found in his research that the more college

students use the Internet to escape worries and problems, the more time they spend on social networking sites.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics about the purpose of using social media by the respondents

Rank	Purpose	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
1.	For purchasing	3.97	5.00	5	1.440
2.	For video conferencing	3.94	5.00	5	1.413
3.	For selling	3.93	5.00	5	1.453
4.	For Tagging related resources	3.92	5.00	5	1.397
5.	For advertisement	3.85	5.00	5	1.399
6.	Finding social contacts	3.82	5.00	5	1.414
7.	For ranking resources	3.81	5.00	5	1.439
8.	For earning money	3.71	5.00	5	1.681
9.	For finding communities of my interest	3.64	4.00	5	1.451
10.	For searching resources not otherwise available	3.58	4.00	5	1.441
11.	For making friends	3.40	3.00	5	1.440
12.	For sharing links	3.29	3.00	5	1.536
13.	For online learning	3.28	3.00	5	1.596
14.	For time passing	3.16	3.00	3	1.307
15.	For finding jobs online	3.07	3.00	3	1.431
16.	For news	2.87	3.00	3	1.438
17.	For leisure/fun/entertainment	2.79	3.00	3	1.237
18.	For communication	2.46	2.00	1	1.359
19.	For research work	2.18	2.00	1	1.422

Note: 5=Always, 4=Frequently, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never

Problems Faced by the Respondents in Using the Social Media

Regarding the problems, most of the respondents remained undecided about most of the listed problems, e.g., website is difficult to understand and use, website contents are in English, available information is not authentic, accessing information is very complicated, difficult to cope with the rapid growth of such websites, people can post whatever they want (either good or bad), lack of security and privacy, confusion due to the availability of many similar websites/web services, lack of time for exploring these websites in detail, user accounts can be easily hacked, and flood of such media/websites is creating anxiety (Mean values are 3.19, 3.03, 2.96, 2.95, 2.89, 2.78, 2.77, 2.71, 2.67, 2.66, and 2.61 respectively). On the other hand they did not agree that they face the problems such as lack of advanced IT skills, and slow Internet connection (Mean= 2.47 and 1.96) (see Table 4).

The concern for lack of security and privacy is also observed by [Cha \(2010\)](#). Cha mentions that online privacy concerns are a deterrent for the frequency of using social media sites. Thus privacy concerns are a barrier for using the Internet and social media sites. He suggests that it is essential for social networking site operators to ensure online privacy to turn potential users into regular users of their sites because potential users will be reluctant to register for, and continue to log into, social networking sites on a regular basis if they fear privacy infringement.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Problems Faced by the Respondents in Using Social Media

|--|--|--|--|--|

Rank	Problems	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
1.	Website is difficult to understand and use	3.19	3.00	4	1.075
2.	Website contents are in English	3.03	3.00	2	1.259
3.	Available information is not authentic	2.96	3.00	3	1.071
4.	Accessing information is very complicated	2.95	3.00	2	1.066
5.	Difficult to cope with the rapid growth of such websites	2.89	3.00	3	1.171
6.	People can post whatever they want (either good or bad)	2.78	3.00	3	1.064
7.	Lack of security and privacy	2.77	3.00	2	1.125
8.	I am confused due to the availability of many similar websites/web services	2.71	3.00	2	.966
9.	Lack of time for exploring these websites in detail	2.67	2.00	2	1.106
10.	User accounts can be easily hacked	2.66	3.00	2	1.048
11.	Flood of such media/websites is creating anxiety	2.61	3.00	3	1.024
12.	Lack of advanced IT Skills	2.47	2.00	2	1.156
13.	Slow Internet Connection	1.96	2.00	2	.898

Note: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Undecided, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

Other Comments by the Respondents

In response to the open ended question for eliciting their other related comments, few respondents mentioned that they should be provided with proper training for using these social media (n= 10), they recommended that the use of these media should be integrated with traditional courses and classroom learning (n=7) and teachers should play an active role in this regard (n= 5). It was also pointed out that now people are making online friends all over the world but they don't know about their next door neighbors (n=1).

Conclusion

The study presents a general trend of social media usage among the Geography students of IUB. It was found that CiteULike, Technorati, Connotea, Blogger, Twitter and Wikis etc. were the most used social media sites by them. It is encouraging to note that none of the listed social media site was found not used or rarely used by the respondents. On the other hand most of the purposes mentioned were related to the academic use of these media, though they also use it for recreational purposes. The students seems equipped with latest technological tools and skills, so they did not agree with any of the related problems, though they remained undecided about the anxiety and security related problems caused by these social media. Thus the findings of this study correlate with the above cited studies which claim that the use of social media is rapidly increasing among young adults and students. Although this survey is restricted to a group of Geography students of IUB, the data obtained provide some insights into how students in Pakistan have been using the social media for both formal and informal learning and communication. It is hoped that the findings described here will help build a foundation for future investigations in Pakistan related to social media. Following recommendations are made on the basis of findings of the study:

- The students at IUB should be provided with better Internet connections to promote the use of social media among young students. The use of social media should be

integrated with the conventional class room teaching and learning process; the teachers should enhance their skills in the use of these media, so they could be able to cope with these emerging global trends.

- Social media site operators should ensure online privacy and security. The multilingual features should be added on these sites, so more people representing different regions and languages can use these sites with great ease.
- More research studies should be conducted on large scales for better understanding of the questions such as 'who is and who is not using these sites, why, and for what purposes?'
- Future research studies should consider expanded samples from other departments of the same and other universities of Pakistan to examine the impact of diverse demographic characteristics on the exploitation of social media sites.
- Through richer, ethnographic researches the potential use of these tools for education in far flung areas of Pakistan should also be explored. Such researches would further assist researchers' ability to understand the long-term implications of these tools for overcoming the illiteracy problems in developing nations.

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