

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' INFORMATION
SEEKING HABITS FROM THE UNIVERSITY
MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has extended its influence across the globe affecting in an unprecedented manner many facets of human life including education. In response to the Malaysian government's directive on strict adherence to protocols such as Movement Control Order (MCO) and social distancing among others, the International Islamic University employed online learning system to replace face-to-face (physical) classes. Social media platforms are very common in modern education system everywhere, especially in Malaysia universities. The main objective of this study was to examine the factors influencing students' information seeking habits from the university management communication platforms during COVID-19 pandemic. The specific objectives of the study include: (1) to identify the types of communication platforms students preferred for information seeking from the university management during COVID-19 pandemic; (2) to determine students' preference and utilization of communication platforms for information seeking from the university management during COVID-19 pandemic; (3) to examine the effect of student's attitude on information seeking habits from the university management during COVID-19 pandemic; and (4) to determine factors influencing students information seeking habits from the university management during COVID-19 pandemic. This study used a quantitative research design with survey method. A total of 200 students from undergraduate and postgraduate programmes were randomly selected for the study. The research found that students preferred using WhatsApp, Facebook and Email to seek information from the university management. Students have positive attitude on information seeking habits from the university management. Information seeking habits are significantly influence by preference, utilization, attitude and source of the message. The findings support the information seeking theory.

خلاصة البحث

لقد وسع وباء كوفيد-19 تأثيره في جميع أنحاء العالم وأثر بطريقة غير مسبقة على العديد من جوانب الحياة البشرية بما في ذلك التعليم. استجابةً لتوجيهات الحكومة الماليزية بشأن الالتزام الصارم بالبروتوكولات مثل أمر التحكم في الحركة (MCO) والتباعد الاجتماعي من بين أمور أخرى، استخدمت الجامعة الإسلامية الدولية نظامًا تعليميًا عبر الإنترنت ليحل محل الفصول (الجسمية) وجهًا لوجه. تعد منصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي شائعة جدًا في نظام التعليم الحديث في كل مكان، خاصة في الجامعات الماليزية. كان الهدف الرئيس من هذه الدراسة هو فحص العوامل التي تؤثر على عادات البحث عن المعلومات لدى الطلاب من منصات اتصالات إدارة الجامعة أثناء وباء كوفيد-19. تشمل الأهداف المحددة للدراسة ما يلي: (1) تحديد أنواع منصات الاتصال التي يفضلها الطلاب للحصول على المعلومات من إدارة الجامعة أثناء جائحة كوفيد-19؛ (2) تحديد تفضيل الطلاب واستخدامهم لمنصات الاتصال للحصول على معلومات تسعى من إدارة الجامعة أثناء وباء كوفيد-19؛ (3) فحص تأثير موقف الطالب على عادات البحث عن المعلومات من إدارة الجامعة أثناء وباء كوفيد-19؛ و (4) تحديد العوامل التي تؤثر على عادات البحث عن المعلومات لدى الطلاب من إدارة الجامعة أثناء جائحة كوفيد-19. استخدمت هذه الدراسة تصميم بحث كمي مع طريقة المسح. وتم اختيار عدد من 200 طالب من برامج البكالوريوس والدراسات العليا بشكل عشوائي للدراسة. وجد البحث أن الطلاب يفضلون استخدام وتسآب وفيسبوك والبريد الإلكتروني للحصول على معلومات من إدارة الجامعة. كما يتمتع الطلاب بموقف إيجابي من عادات البحث عن المعلومات من إدارة الجامعة. وتتأثر عادات البحث عن المعلومات بشكل كبير من خلال التفضيل والاستخدام والموقف ومصدر الرسالة. كانت النتائج تدعم نظرية البحث عن المعلومات.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in Communication

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Sekou Oumar Bangoura

Sekou Oumar Bangoura

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The globe is witnessing a worldwide disease epidemic caused by a coronavirus, also well-known as COVID-19. Authorities and public health organizations around Malaysia have set social distancing and stay-at-home instructions to fight the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Government restrictions and policies to stop widespread of the pandemic vary from state to state. However, government policies to manage the coronavirus outbreak often lead to the closure of schools and restriction of social meetings. Public interaction has also significantly reduced.

The government, institutions of higher learning and other citadels of learning throughout the world have launched different initiatives to continue the teaching and learning activities while containing the virus at the same time. Several issues have however arisen, and these include what the content of learning should be, the methodology of teaching students, how will students learn effectively, what will be the lecturer's workload, the teaching environment and what will finally be the result of these activities on education equity.

Large-scale public efforts to use communication platforms in support of online teaching and learning, distance education, during this pandemic, COVID-19, are developing and growing quickly. Different kinds of literatures have highlighted some shortcomings, such as inadequate information gap, and a complex environment at home (Ali, 2020). Notwithstanding these challenges, the prevailing situation requires temporary measures that will ensure that students' learning is not affected.

With the difference in opportunities to connect in person, new challenges arose to continue social linkages. A study on factors influencing students' information - seeking habits from the university management communication platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic is called for. At the time of this pandemic, industry reports disclosed that digital media use has immensely grown as students spent a lot of time at home due to coronavirus lockdowns (Kemp, 2020). Such increases remained mainly predominant for social networks and messaging apps, but particularly noteworthy was the extraordinary uptake in video conferencing apps and online lecturing that offered students extensive dependence on information and communications technologies for social interface under stay-at-home conditions.

One of the technological tools that utilize the internet is social media (Askool & Nakata, 2010; Greenberg, 2010). As social network facilitates the communication and interaction, students use it as a platform to seek information from the university and lecturers to facilitate their studies. It's shown that in Malaysia, communication platforms have been used as a tool to facilitate students seeking information from the university regarding their study during this period of the COVID 19 pandemic (Wan Roslina, Ziti Fariha & Nurul Haslinda, 2017).

These communication platforms are user-friendly, easy and effective for students to receive and send messages to the university management (Wan Roslina et al., 2017), enable students to download, upload, share, and video call during the class discussion with the lecturers (Nur Hananie & Nurhidayah, 2016). They make it possible for students to seek and share information with the university and lecturers. Due to their popularity, universities and lecturers are also utilizing social networks for effective academic consultations with the students, both inside and beyond the classrooms (Waleed, Mohd Shahizan & Mahdi, 2014).

The social network platforms help students to get academic updates and seek information from the university and lecturers. Information science deals with seeking awareness about an event; it can be defined as activities in which the information that users will need determine the seeking habits of the users and subsequent use of the information (Julien, 1996). It is a discipline that focuses primarily on the understanding of channels through which people get information, seek and make use of the information they got (Wilson, 1997:551).

Every student engages in information seeking and they exhibit different kinds of behavior during the process of getting and authenticating the information. Human interaction is about communication, thus seeking information is a natural and integral part of human life (Marchionni, 1995). According to Wilson (2008), information-seeking is all about looking for information for a certain purpose which may be to satisfy a certain goal. This is different from information seeking habits. The latter refers to the manner exhibited by individuals during the process of gathering, sourcing and retrieving information. People seek information for different purposes which include knowledge updating, understanding of a phenomenon, for public or personal use (Emmanuel, George & Oni, 2010). Wilson (2008) maintains that it has to do with the psychological reaction of those who seek, retrieve and plan to use information (Karunarathna, 2008).

Communication plays an important role in human existence and human relations. Many share thoughts, opinions, ideas, novelty by communicating with each other. In contemporary society, globalization and technological explosion, media are ushering new techniques and tools for communication. People who live in a distant place from each other can now effectively and successfully communicate with one another through social networks or mediums. This has removed barrier of face-to-face

communication. Nowadays, due to COVID-19 pandemic, students are using different tools or platforms to seek information from the university management. Students' communication with their lecturers is determined by the channels of communication. Some students communicate with their instructors through traditional ways, that is, face-to-face discussion with their lecturers, or they might prefer the modern tools, they utilize the new platforms or social media. This has become the order of the day due to the advent of the Internet. Thus, the technological explosion has made computer-mediated communication tools to become widely used among people especially as a medium of teaching-learning.

However, this new technique of communication also comes with challenges. There is a need to study factors influencing students' information-seeking habits as it influences the way and manner through which students seek information and communicate and interact with the university management. Stresses the fact that the internet, technological explosion and computer-mediated communication platforms have totally revolutionized the way students communicate within themselves, lecturers and with the school management in general (Baltes et al., 2002).

Research studies such as (Ghanbari Baghestan et al., 2009, 2010; Fong and Suaiman, 2011) stressed that computer-mediated communication tools, traditional media or avenues are the most preferred communication channels within the school system. This study, therefore, investigates factors influencing students' information-seeking habits from the university management.

1.2 PROBLEM OF STATEMENT

Coronavirus (COVID-19) was detected in December 2019. It was declared as a dangerous, worldwide pandemic and an extremely infectious disease in March 2020

by the World Health Organization (WHO). As a safety measure to slow down its spread, people all across the globe have come out with strict rules such as full or partial lockdowns, social distancing rules, and restrictions. To decrease the risks of humans contaminating each other with COVID-19, areas where humans network closely remained closed, as well as educational establishments. Therefore, as a result of the actions taken generally, more than 1.5 billion registered students of all ages from all across the world faced interruption of education which approximates to nearly 90% of the worldwide student population (UNESCO, 2020a; 2020b; UNICEF, 2020).

Some studies such as Hemminger, Lu, Vanghan and Adams (2007), Leckie et al. (1996), Leckie (2005), Phabha et al. (2007), Perley et al. (2007), Connaway, Dickey and Radford (2011), Niu and Hemminger (2012), Evans and Saponaro (2005), Anderson et al. (2001), and Pareek and Rana (2013) have been conducted to investigate factors influencing student's information-seeking behaviors. However, none of these studies or rather a few numbers of these studies focus on factors influencing students' information-seeking habits from the university.

Based on this, this present study focuses on the factors influencing the information-seeking habits of the students from the university management. The influencing factors can vary from student to student and can include personal factors, kind of the information sought, tools or platforms used to search for such information (Leckie et al., 1996).

In recent times in Malaysia, social networks communication platforms have been more incorporated in the education field. It is an active means of communication, particularly between students and lecturers (Adam & Nor Zairah, 2014). Consequently, students use communication platforms for academic-related matters from the university and lecturers. For example, in order to develop new ideas and to

share educational information, they form online group discussions on Facebook, Imaalum, WhatsApp, Email, Google Meet, which have proven to be effective tools for seeking educational information and for sharing them (Waleed et al., 2014). Thus, this has made social networks one of the most efficient communication platforms in an educational setting. It is pertinent at this point to investigate some of the factors influencing students' information seeking from the university management communication platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the positive influence of social networks, it also has some drawbacks and concerns. There are questions regarding the influence or effect of using social networks to seek information from the university, the effect of such searching on students' academic grades and information-seeking habits. Kirschner & Karpinski, (2010) argued that there has been an addiction of students to using social networks and this in the contrary has negative impacts on their academic progress. Moreover, students could face time allocation problems. They could not distinguish, and separate time allocated for seeking information from the lecturers and personal purposes (Al-Tarawneh, 2014).

Nur Hananie and Nurhidayah (2016) supported this proposition where they found that students may use communication platforms to seek information for their studies such as searching and studying their projects online, but at the same time, they may use it for chatting and playing online games (Adam & NurZahirah, 2014). Hence, time allocation plays an important role in students' daily routine especially when it comes to seeking information for in their studies. Ahmed and Qazi (2011) assert using social networks platforms to seek information interfere with students' studies when they fail to allocate time efficiently and are unable to fulfill their academic-related task smoothly. Thus, the unbalanced time management between seeking information

for their studies and personal purposes on social media could lead to a drop in their grades (Fori, 2016), due to the lack of focus on their studies.

Students at various levels of learning are now using social network platforms to communicate especially with their lecturers and with some department offices. The questions on whether the platforms used or being used promote their studies or seeking information from the university management remain unanswered. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the factors influencing students' information seeking habits from the university management through communication platforms during COVID-19 pandemic. Also, this study will examine utilization choices among the communication platforms to seek information for their needs.

New social networks platform involves the Zoom, Google Meet, Facebook, WhatsApp, and E-mail. The advanced platforms depend on technology and vary in their functions. For example, the internet could be utilized as a search mechanism to search and share information, whereas certain platforms make use of email, WhatsApp, voice or text message, and video for the communication process. Several studies have solely focused on a particular communication platform. For instance, Kasavana et al., 2010 focus on social media platforms, Junco & Cotton, 2011 focus on direct messaging while Dobos, 1992; Neuman & Brownell, 2009 focus on the internet, and e-mail.

Apart from the study which focuses on one platform, some studies have been focusing on groups of communication platforms. The study of Newman and Brownell (2009) analyzed both positive and negative aspects of three communication technologies which include social networks, E-mail, and instant messaging. Likewise, the study conducted by Kasavana et al. (2010) focuses on the effects of online social networking on the generosity industry. In a similar vein, Hargittai (2010) explored the

university students' abilities and capabilities in utilizing the Internet in their school activities. The focus of Dobos's (1988) research is on the communication functions concerning production, innovation, and maintenance aspects as used for face-to-face discussions, either for printed or electronic memos.

The present study will be widening the range of platforms that will be examined to encompass the different medium platforms that are used to seek information from the university. Thus, it will help in understanding how students use the communication platforms to seek information about the function, the rate or frequency of use, usage and duration of use.

Odongo and Bukenya (2004) assert that information-seeking habits refer to the manner through which people search information. The author maintains that students' exhibit purposeful information habits when they are seeking data for their course assignments, preparing for their class presentations or group discussions, planning to attend seminars, or writing their research projects. Therefore, information-seeking habits exhibited by students include the reading of printed material or experimentation (Bhatti, 2009). Academic librarians all over the world are inquisitive to know information-seeking habits of students so that they can understand the needs of students and make effective plans to provide for these needs.

Ossai-onah (2013) also buttresses the fact that the university library is the major seeker of students' information-seeking habits in Nigerian universities. He maintains that understanding students' information seeking habits, especially undergraduates is still the major challenge of this era. Therefore, this present study aims to explore the factors influencing students' information-seeking habits from the university management communication platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to examine the factor influencing students' information-seeking habits from the university management communication platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific aims of the study are:

1. To identify the types of communication platforms students preferred for information seeking from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To determine students' preference and utilisation of communication platforms for information seeking from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To examine the effect of student's attitudes on information seeking habits from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
4. To determine factors influencing student's information seeking habits from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the research objectives of this study, the following are the research questions of this study:

1. What types of communication platforms do students prefer to use when seeking information from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the students' preference and utilisation of communication platforms for information-seeking habits from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. What is the effect of students' attitudes on information-seeking habits from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic? And
4. What are the factors influencing student's information seeking habits from the university management during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The main focus of the present study is to examine the factor influencing students' information-seeking habits from the university management platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of the communication platforms by the students to seek information from the university. This study will benefit students and university management. This is due to the emergence of social network use in the educational setting. This improves the ways students seek, send, and share information. Further, to find if there is a relationship between the communication platform and the understanding of seeking information among the students. Coupled with this, factors influencing students preferred and utilized communication platforms will contribute to the university's priority in providing information on the preferred platforms.

The use of those communication platforms could develop positive or negative influence on students' information seeking habits. They use it for both purposes including for study and personal needs (Al-Tarawneh, 2014). Therefore, this study will provide the foundation for understanding social media use in education as a tool for information seeking and educational information sharing, instead of the fulfillment of personal needs. For example, WhatsApp has been used as a platform for discussion and of sharing educational information and academic-related matter among students themselves and with their lecturers (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). Hence, understanding the

foundation will create awareness among students on the impact of using social media towards improving their information seeking.

Also, this study will contribute to the use of social networks as class-related tasks. Particularly, lecturers could use social networks in strengthening class instructions, projects, discussions, and as a medium to share educational information (Waleed et al., 2014). To elaborate, lecturers could share and update additional information regarding the given assignments or projects. The reason is that most of the university students use social networks in the educational setting (Waleed & Mohd Shahizan, 2013). Thus, communication platforms could be one of the effective platforms for lecturers to reach and get connected with students. Students seek information and expect lecturers to give immediate responses and feedback since they are active on it (Nur Hananie & Nurhidayah, 2016). The study will shed light on how students and lecturers could make effective use of social networks for educational and personal purposes.

Moreover, this study will contribute to the use of information seeking processing model in explaining and discussing the factors that influence student information-seeking.

Yet, although there are various sources of sending and receiving messages, certain students prefer using E-mails, alongside mobile messages in seeking information from the university and communicate with their tutors. Hence, the present study will show that students' behavior plays a great role in the students' choice of communication platform.

Furthermore, the study will essentially add to information-seeking theory or model. The findings of the study will also demonstrate that the students' awareness of information seeking model is positively related to the communication platforms used

to seek information by students and therefore, should be given priority by the university management.

This study will show how the growth in global internet access has eased communication between students, lecturers, and the university. The study will be a guide or reference material for students or other researchers conducting a similar study.

The study will argue that the very impactful action model involves an accompanying and analytics-driven social networks strategy to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study will assist the university management, instructors, and students alike to adjust to the realities of the current situation to ensure the continuity and progress of education and academic activities.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

This study comprises five chapters. The first chapter introduces the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions of the study and significance of the study.

The second chapter covers the literature review. The focus of this chapter is to review the past theoretical perspectives and previous empirical studies on social network platforms. Based on the reviews, the hypotheses of the study will be developed.

The third chapter will describe the research methodology, focusing on the research design, research method to be used, population and sampling procedure, instrument and measurement, how the data would be collected, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter four will describe the analysis and results of the study. The focus will be on answering the research objectives and testing the research hypotheses developed for the study.

Chapter five will comprise of three major parts: the conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for the futures research.