

Social Media – The Web The New Hybrid For Education Enhancement

ZAINAL ABIDIN HASHIM
Director, Bangi Learning Centre
Open University Malaysia
zainalabidin_hashim@oum.edu.my

Abstract

The emergence of internet-based social media has made it possible, in terms of space, time and frequency, to communicate with hundreds or even thousands of other people. Thus, the impacts of learning through social media has been greatly magnified globally. As such, social media is a hybrid element of learning mix between traditional and nontraditional sense. The content, timing and frequency of the social media-based learning mode exhibits free flow of information and knowledge regardless of boundaries and time. This stands in contrast to the traditional integrated learning paradigm where a high degree of control persist. Thus, social media enriches learning and heighten career prospects. For instant, the web helps institutions to refocus from teaching to learning and from teacher to student. Current higher education need to respond : does it make learning more accessible?, does it promote improved learning?, does it reduce per unit costs of education?. The web provides educational opportunities at workplace, community and home for those unable to attend college due to cultural, economic or social barriers. That is starting to change as educators have devise new ways to capitalize on web-based technology. Studies shows, through webs and internet tools, working adults relish the opportunities to pursue their studies and demonstrated similiar level of contacts and interactions as to regular classes. This paper intend to discuss further the success, contributions and ways of overcoming the cultural, economic and social barriers of higher education via the web. Deliberate on its implications as to lifestyle, career developments and the way forward of higher education in the future to cater for the working mass.

Keywords : *internet-based, learning paradigm, web-based technology.*

1.0 Introduction

Current higher education demand better accessibility, improved learning cognitive and reduces per unit costs of education. As such, education integration with technology should be able to provide educational opportunities at workplace, community at large and home for those unable to attend college due to cultural, economic or social constraints. By doing so, education, information and updates exhibits free flow regardless of boundaries and time. This stands in contrast to the traditional integrated learning paradigm where high degree of obstacles and control persist. By integrating educators and technology; social media, the web, a new devise to capitalise on web-based learning approach.

Advances in communication technology since the mid-1990s have made education and learning through various social media a feasible educational option. The idea an educator can reach learners in remote locations, when ever necessary and regardless of distance enable the majority of the population to learn subjects to which they wouldn't otherwise have access. Thus, web-based learning open opportunities to learners to have access to relatively obscure subjects. There is, in fact, a huge library of courses and training offered around the globe. Web-based learning has made it possible to study nearly any subjects from nearly anywhere in the world.

However, not everyone has embraced this development as it doesn't replicates the experience of a real classroom. What's more, web-based learning requires more learners initiatives and disciples than traditional classroom learning. Historically, virtual learning has tended to be little dry, rely mainly on text and graphs to convey information. Advances in computing power, communication network and sophisticated technology have made web-based learning a better alternative for college education, training and skill enhancement.

Literature Review

There has been several formal and informal research done pertaining to web-based learning approach. However, several common assessment issues need to be address which include learning outcome, learners satisfaction and pedagogical usability. As such, teaching and learning process by mean of web-based demonstrates a true integration of technology, content and pedagogy in a holistic approach.

(a) Learning Outcomes

Based on several studies, their findings were rather diverse and non conclusive. However, one pertinent finding was, courses or training that need extensive explanations, demonstrations and involve graphs and equations such as economics and mathematics, the traditional face-to-face is far more superior and easily understood as compared to web-based learning. Courses that rely on readings and cross-references like psychology and education, learners were to learn more by mean of web-based as compared to traditional face-to-face, Maki (2002).

Several other studies depicted as follows ; MBA and psychology learners benefited and gained more by means of web-based learnings, however, nursing and statistics students scored higher by mean of traditional learning mode, Wang (2000). While there is no definitive conclusion from these studies, it does suggest that there is potential for achieving comparative or even higher learning outcomes in web-based courses mode.

(b) **Learners Satisfaction**

When gauging the level of student satisfactions between web-based learning as compared to traditional learning mode, indicators used were convenience, delivery mechanism and personal interaction with their instructors. In summary, online formats can deliver comparable satisfactions although motivation and personal touch might be deficient. Consequently, satisfactions were much more heightens for courses that emphasize on reading, less calculations and high level courses like MBA and education.

(c) **Pedagogical Usability**

This approach of learning emphasize on trouble-free interaction with the software in use aiming at supporting the learning process. Hence, the concept of pedagogical usability is focus to the learning process and utility of pedagogical software : learner control, learner satisfaction, simplicity, reduction of complexity, collaborative learning, applicability and flexibility. Pedagogical usability and technical usability should be considered concurrently as they are strongly related to each other. In certain cases, increased technical usability could influence negatively pedagogical usability since high level of technical usability does not contribute necessarily to the learning outcome. However, the usability concept must be extended to capture issues that are fundamental to learning and tailored towards learner-centred approach than lecturer-centred methods in order to realize learning benefits.

Several studies shows that there exists significant interactions between the variables that represent both of the usability components or criteria. It is depicted in terms of correlations but it does not necessary mean that one variable causes another. Explanations of their correlations will involve theoretical considerations and the triangulations of knowledge from other sources and findings. In a correlation analysis involving 12 pedagogical usability variables and 3 technical usability variables, only 2 variables were negatively correlated namely *ask for assistance* and *use of textbooks* when using the web-based learning material. The possible explanation is that, the higher the technical usability the less likely learners seek for assistance and use of other resources. Other variables such as simplicity, efficiency, adaptability, multimedia, autonomy and motivation compliments their usability to the fullest.

With vast improvements in IT and their related accesories, technical usability were well-designed and implemented thus making pedagogical usability was high and widely achieved among learners and lecturers globally. However, through time, the web-based learning method and approach will be facing new challenges as expectations to innovations and knowlegde heightens. As such, new cycle of design, usability and evaluations of their learning outcome and learners satisfactions are necessary to acquire the utmost pedagogical value from the web-based learning method.

Development and Utilization of Online Technology

With the rapid proliferation of courses, programs and learning institutions across the globe, acquiring knowledge and becoming a university graduate seems to a compelling need among our society. Thus, web-based learning seems to be the next best and convenient alternative. History demonstrates that, the traditional face-to-face courses have been effective in producing university graduates however, online learning are as effective as traditional mode of learnings.

New technologies and IT improvements have lend strong support to the development and utilization of online technologies in the delivery of course materials. This is due to the fact that, similar course objective and goals were achieved in the online environment, same degree of learning outcome achieved, course satisfaction was comparable, learners are comfortable with the technology and delivery environment except that it lack of personal interaction.

The use of online course, better known as web-based learning, are very beneficial for the university community. The use of technology has many benefits in the learning environment. Essentially, online technology makes education available at any time and any place and at the same time provides a comprehensive and comparable learning environment. Yet, as with any endeavor, there are pros and cons, which must be taken into account for a balance strategy where learners enjoy the convenience provided by the web-based learning but missing the personal interaction as a tradeoff with the tradisional classroom environment.

However, the integration of some web-based courses can be beneficial to both the learners and the university. For instance, web-based courses can be a productive strategy for increasing course enrolment in between semester break or short courses which tradisional shown lower enrolment figures. Thus, with the integration of more online courses, more learners are given the opportunity to become university students.

The convenient factor encourages the learners to take courses anywhere and anytime. Obviously, there are also other benefits to the technology associated with the web-based learning environment in terms of supplementing the traditional course environment. This technology can provide a valuable information portal in a variety of traditional course settings. These results may indicate that a hybrid type of course could provide the ideal balance between interaction and convenience.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Web-based Learning

Current technological and IT advancement and innovations offered so many delivery options available with so much information and knowledge to convey to our potential learners. The internet and intranet hold tremendous potential for the rapid dissemination of knowledge and information to a worldwide workforce when utilized correctly. A New York based research centre estimated that, 92 % of large organizations will use some form of online learning within the next 5 years.

There are several distinct advantages and disadvantages of designing, developing and delivering web-based learning.

(a) Advantages

1. Extendibility, accessibility and suitability :
Training at own pace, any time and any place.
2. Collaborative and exploratory learning environment.
3. Easy and affordable course delivery
4. Inexpensive worldwide distribution :
Accessed from any computer keeping delivery cost down.

5. Ease of content update :
Changes to content are instant and made available immediately.
6. Reduce travel cost and time saving.
7. Access is controllable :
Can direct receiver, its frequency and when to receive.
8. Direct access to numerous training resources :
Capitalize on offerings and enhance learning distributions.

(b) **Disadvantages**

1. Bandwidth/browser Limitations May Restrict Instructional Methodologies :
Video, audios and intense graphics can affect delivery and limited.
2. Limited Bandwidth Means Slower Performance :
Sounds, videos and large graphics make 'waiting time' longer.
3. Time Required for Downloading Applications
Need suitable kpbs modem to comply course content.
4. Cannot Design and Develop Robust Multimedia Courses.
5. Web-based Training Has High-fixed Cost :
Initial cost outlay maybe on the high side.

Conclusion

The rapid expansion of the internet and increasing software capabilities are influencing the dynamics of teaching and learning on many different levels. Web-based learning tools are constantly being re-designed by the developers to improve their effectiveness. As such, numerous studies shows that, web-based courses are widely accepted and at times even expected as being part of learners experience in education.

Concurrently, when the web-based tools are professionally developed, implemented, maintained and administrated, the positive support for learning can be very rewarding and capable of attracting more learners. The tools themselves can have an impact on learners' perceived learning in positive or negative ways. Trainings, questioning of implementation processes as well as reflection and usability studies on how, when and why web-based tools are used is essential to ensure that chosen tools achieve what they are designed to accomplish : to positively enhance learners learning and instructors teaching.

Nothing before has captured the imagination and interest of education simultaneously around the globe more than the web-based learning. Claims have been made that the web-based learning are able to free teaching and learning from the physical boundaries of classrooms and the time restraints of class schedules. Moreover, the web-based learning can help us refocus our institutions from teaching to

learning, from teacher to learners. Thus, making education more attainable by more people : that is, expanding education opportunities in the workplace, community or home, for those unable to attend school or college due to cultural, economic or social barrier.

Britain's Open University students relished the opportunity to continue their study without interfering with family commitments, instructors found the experiences exhausting yet exhilarating and the administrators demonstrated that the level of contact and interaction among the learners and instructors was very much similar to regular face-to-face students.

References

- Gary W. James (2006). www.allencomm.com/events.
- Hadjerrouit, Said. (2010). *A Conceptual Framework for Using and Evaluating Web-Based Learning Resources*. University of Agder, Norway.
- Maki, W.S & Whitteraker, P.D. (2002). Multi media Comprehension Skill of Web-based and Lecture Course. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. May 2000.
- Nokelainen, P. (2006). An Empirical Assessment of Pedagogical Usability Criteria For Digital Learning Material. *Education Technology & Society*, 9(2).
- Storey, M. A & b. Phillips. (2002). Evaluating the Usability of Web-based Learning Tools. *Education Technology & Society* 5, (3), 2002, University of Victoria, Canada.
- Wang, A. Y. & Newlin, M. (2000). Characteristics of Students Enrol and Study Psychology Web-based Class. *Journal of Education Psychology*, 92 : 137-143.
- Weber, Michael & Lennon, Ron. (2007). Multi-Course Comparison of Traditional Verses Web-Based Course Delivery System. *The Journal of Education Online*, Vol. 4, No. 2, July 2007.