A Case of Academic Social Networking Sites Usage in Malaysia: Drivers, Benefits, and Barriers

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ABSTRACT

Social networking tools have become an integral part of our daily lives. Recently, a new type of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) namely Academic Social Networking sites (ASNSs) has attracted global users. There is perceived usefulness on the impact of ASNSs on patterns of academic research activities. However, it remains unclear why some researchers do not use ASNSs at all. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore the ASNSs usage among Malaysian academic researchers and to investigate benefits, specific purpose, drivers and barriers of using ASNSs. A total of 210 completed cases were collected through paper-based and online-based questionnaire. In order to show the outcome of the research, descriptive interpretation of data is performed. The overall findings of this research indicate that there is low rate of ASNSs usage among researchers. In addition, the results show that colleagues, attitude toward technology and communication benefits are the drivers to use ASNSs and trust, privacy and security are the common barriers regarding to use ASNSs.

KEYWORDS

Academic Researcher, Academic Social Network Sites, Research University, Social Networking, Usage

INTRODUCTION

Recently, a new type of SNS by focusing on research has appeared and attracted global users for instance; Academia.edu¹ and ResearchGate². In addition to all fundamental functionalities of SNSs, ASNSs incorporate various research-specific tools, for instance; citation management, paper recommendation engines and knowledge management tools which assist researchers to collaboratively structure, coordinate and conduct their work online (Bullinger et al., 2011). The advent of ASNSs such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate came with much hope and expectations. ResearchGate is a SNS that provides a platform where researchers and scientists can collaborate, pose and answer
questions, and share their research works. Academia.edu is a SNS that provides a platform for academics to share their published and unpublished research works, monitor the analytics and assess the impact of their research. All of these ASNSs also have all of the features which conventional SNSs like Facebook and Twitter have, and more, given that they are tailored to a more specific need of the academia. Nevertheless, the low rate of use among these ASNSs as against their conventional counterparts is discouraging and disturbing (Bullinger et al., 2011; Church and Salam, 2010). As an example, ResearchGate, even though it was founded in 2008, can only boast of 5 million members till date (www.researchgate.net, 2014). Academia.edu, founded in 2008, has 11 million subscribers (www.academia.edu, 2014). Collaborative aspect distinguishes ASNSs from hedonic software but also from other online technologies designed to support researchers.

This study was carried out and empirically designed to examine the usage of ASNSs in academic area conducted in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) as one of the leading research universities in Malaysia. Altbach (2009) asserts that research universities seem significant in developing countries for their own national development to compete in the worldwide knowledge economy. According to He et al. (2009) technologies that simplify the sharing of knowledge, expertise and collaboration among academic researchers play an important role in research growth and productivity. Researchers (Da Silva and Davis, 2011; Liu and Cheng, 2005) have shown that the university research productivity has related positively towards universities’ academic ranking. Indeed, the productivity of the researchers is related to great level of collaboration. Therefore, the capability of the academic researchers is considered as a major factor of productive scientific collaboration to successfully communicate with other researchers (Abramo et al., 2013). Hence, the use of ASNSs as a collaborative tool will increase the research productivity and accordingly increase the universities’ academic ranking. This study is conducted to identify the trends how academic researchers use ASNSs. The main objectives of this study are:

I. To find out the use of ASNSs by academic researchers.
II. To identify the effect of gender, age, position, academic discipline and experience on ASNSs usage.
III. To recognize specialized ASNSs among researchers.
IV. To find out the benefits of using ASNSs.
V. To know the specific purpose in using ASNSs.
VI. To find out drivers and barriers in using ASNSs.

The paper is structured as follows: after a brief review of the literature on ASNSs (Section 2), the research methodology is presented (Section 3). In Sections 4 data is analyzed and descriptive statistics is used to describe the findings. Section 5 concludes the paper and suggests future research avenues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are few studies that focus on ASNSs (Jamali et al., 2014). This literature discusses prior studies on ASNSs and point out shortcomings in the literature. The study conducted by Bullinger et al. (2010) on collaboration in research through Social Research Network Sites (SRNS) discusses how the SRNS can support collaborative research. In addition, Bullinger et al. (2010) has developed taxonomy of SRNS based on the target of their fundamental functionalities. Bullinger et al. (2011) investigated researchers’ acceptance and adoption of SRNS by analyzing qualitative results of 11 focus group sessions. Salahshour et al. (2014) developed a new hierarchy model by using TOPSIS
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