THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES (SNSs) AND STUDENTS' SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper was the extension of the past study conducted which to investigate the perception of competent development between employer and graduate on soft skills. The result indicated the five selection criteria namely communication skills, personal attributes, social skills, mind skills, IT and numeric skills become the most important factors that contribute to the employment. Realize on the importance of the soft skills, another study was conducted to determine whether social networking sites (SNS) can help students to develop their soft skills or otherwise. The enjoyment of using the technology cannot be stopped lately; everyone probably has at least one SNS for themselves. At first glance this may seem like a waste of time especially if this involves students. This study could provide the empirical evidence that support the good impact on the usage of SNS among students.
This study also investigated the relationship between the five identified soft skills in social networking sites and the students' soft skills development. The study used the quantitative approach in assessing the data. Survey questionnaires were distributed to the 50 respondents which come from the Bachelor of Business Administration with E-Commerce (BBAEC) students of KUIS. For this research, five hypotheses have been tested using the Pearson Correlation and it was found that out of the five soft skills only mind skill cannot be developed by social networking site. The other hypotheses were accepted. Finally, the implications and conclusions were presented in the last section of this paper.

Key words: *soft skills, social networking sites (SNSs), students of KUIS*

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Introduction

In a couple of years ago, the phenomenon of online social networking has changed the world mainstream. The culture to meet friends or other people face to face slowly disappear when people now prefer to meet others through online social networking like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, blogs, emails and others. People have been involved actively in social activities on the Internet since the rise of the web 2.0 phenomenon.

Social networking sites (SNSs) are common among students now due to the fastest technological changes. Students who have an account or accounts on social networking sites is said to be as a student of the 21st century. Facebook discovered that the average time users spent on Facebook is more than 55 minutes per day. The craziness of people using social networking sites per day at this moment has reached a level that is difficult to suppress anymore.

Another scenario highlighted in this paper is about the fierce competition among graduates for the limited job vacancies. The issue of unemployment or difficult to find jobs among graduates have yet to be resolved. In this 21st century, employers are still looking for graduates or job seekers with talented competencies and skills ability. Graduates should possess more skills in order to have advantages in job seeking for today's competitive marketplace. The skills needed by students including analytical thinking, problem solving skills, creativity, communication skills and the ability to work within various groups (Ramakrishnan, 2012).

This paper aimed to explain the relationship between social networking sites and the soft skills development among students in higher education institution. This paper demonstrated how these two variables can complement each other. The issue highlighted in this paper is whether or not the identified soft skills in SNSs can help develop and improve students' soft skills as most students tend to spend hours and hours in front of a PC or laptop every day.

Students are encouraged to strengthen their soft skills and do not only focus on the academic matters. These soft skills cannot be achieved effectively by just attending classes. Given the scenarios of using SNSs are becoming extremely popular, therefore this study was conducted to investigate whether or not the SNSs can help develop and improve students' soft skills.

Problem statement

The passionate of using online social networking among students cannot be stopped right now. Time students spend on SNSs tend to increase from time to time. Some believe that SNSs are not good for adolescents and students due to its contents.

In recent years, many countries including Malaysia have reported a rise in graduate unemployment. Many studies suggested that within this fierce competition for limited job vacancies have required the fresh graduates to posses more skill in order to become outstanding in the competitive job market (Skinner et. al, 2004). Malaysian graduates was said to have less basic skills and knowledge. For decades employers continue to complain about the lack of soft skills among fresh graduates (Shculz, 2008).

The issues of unemployment among graduates are associated with the notion that graduates have not enough acquired soft skills during their studies. Acquiring soft skills has been acknowledged as important among the stiff competition for jobs in industry today.

Here, the question of whether or not the contents of SNSs can help users particularly students at the higher learning level to improve their soft skills become this research direction. This study attempts to reveal how SNSs can benefits students in developing soft skills.

While completing this paper, it was found that there are difficulties in finding previous researches which focus on the relationship between SNSs and soft skills. Most of the issue of SNSs and soft skills are discussed separately in the journals. This means that there are lots of gaps in the existing literature relating to this matter.

Since very little research has been conducted, it is important that this study will be carried out to investigate the relationship between the use of SNSs and soft skills development among students.

Objective

The general purpose of this study is to examine how SNSs can develop students' soft skill. Specifically, this paper aims to determine the relationship between communication skills, social skills, mind skills, information technology (IT) and numeric skills, and personal attributes skills that proven to exist in social networking sites and the students soft skill development.

Literature review

Graduates nowadays are expected to not only excel in academic achievement but at the same time are also equipped with soft skills to meet the needs of employers (Smith, 2005). The majority of employers are continuously emphasizing the importance of hiring the individuals with well developed soft skills.

In Wikipedia, soft skills is referred to as a cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark people to varying degrees. Meanwhile, Jody (2008) described the soft skills as skills required by the employees to interact with others, get along productively with others and work in team.

Soft skills such as communication skills, IT skills, mind skills, personal attributes, social skills, problems solving skills, management and entrepreneurship are some of the soft skills that employers value as important for potential employees to possess. Employers are still seeking for vital soft skills in graduates, rather than degree-specific knowledge (Skinner et. al, 2004). These soft skills can help graduates to be more competent and this can lead to the success of an organization (Winkelmann, 2010).

Shulz (2008) said that there are two methods that can be used to improve soft skills. It can either by enrolling personal training or through self training. For self training, books are often used as a main reference. However, because of the enjoyment of using the SNSs, this study was conducted to find out whether or not SNSs can be used to improve soft skills. All online social networks nowadays provide functionality for communication and interaction in various ways (Winkelmann et. al, 2009).

Social networking sites is defined in (Boyd, 2009) as the web-based services that allow individuals to build a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system and articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection. It views and traverses their list of connections and those made by others within the system. From the first SNS was introduced in 1997 to date, there are more than hundreds of SNSs support a wide range of interests and practices of the people who integrated SNSs into their daily practices.

Previous research discovered that youth are muscularly motivated to join SNSs with intention to keep strong connection with friends, to strengthen relation with new contacts, and at least to meet new people online (Acquisti & Gross, 2005). With the right intention to use the online social networking give students the immense power to direct their own learning. The students can find like-minded students and expert and the conversation focused on similar interest (Badell, 2010). Other advantage of using SNSs is that it gives the benefit of the academic aspect where students can find, organize, analyze, share, discuss, criticize and create information (Wesh, 2009). However, there are also disadvantages where sometimes the personal information from particular users was revealed by other users. Stalking, harassment, blackmail in SNSs give problems to the users (Gross and Acquisti, 2005).

Soft Skills in Social Networking Sites (SNSs)

Students can improve their communication skills through SNSs. Meanwhile, students in lower classes can use SNSs to build connections and form relationships with people all over the world. They can also learn different languages through the SNSs (Williams, 2008). Companies can meet customers through its strategic communication in SNSs. By using blogs, Facebook and others, employees can become a spokesperson for the company and learn how to negotiate with the public about their products (Lewis, 2010). However, some might think that SNSs can kill communication skills because there is no face-to-face interaction between each other. SNSs can also lead to poor writing skills because of the use of the short form words when chatting with friends (Badell, 2010).

Social skill becomes important in young adults when the peer groups become the primary resource for emotional support (Allen et. al., 2010). Young people who lack social skills use online

social networks as a form of social compensation (Sheldon, 2008). However, SNSs can hinder social skills of people. The level of confidence for the people who always hide behind the SNSs reduced when they want to talk face to face with people. A study conducted by Ellison et al. (2007) suggests Facebook is indeed implicated in students' efforts to develop and maintain their social capital at college. It also helps students to maintain relationship with friends.

Mind skills are much related to decision making and develop this skill helps people to solve problems better by using creativity. Adolescents learn valuable thinking perspective, decision making, argumentative and critical thinking skills through chat rooms with other teenagers located all over the world in SNS (Tynes, 2007).

The Internet and SNSs can help students to learn how to improve the skills of information technology (IT) and numeric through blogs, YouTube, Flicker, MySpace and Facebook. It also allows the average person to create content that can be shared with the audience throughout the world (Loretto, 2009).

The feelings of affiliation, belonging, need for information, goal achievement, self-identity, values, and notions of accepted behavior represent the skills of personal attributes which can be found in SNSs. SNSs like Friendster can be used as a locus of publicly articulated social networks that allows users to negotiate the presentations of self and connect with other people (Boyd, 2004).

Methodology

This study used the quantitative approach in assessing the data. The descriptive study was carried out by distributing questionnaires to 50 students of Bachelor in Adminstration with E-Commerce (BBAEC) of KUIS. The questionnaire in this study is divided into 2 parts: part A is a fact-based question to obtain the demographic information of respondents and part B consists of questions related to the soft skills in SNSs. Five Likert scale was used as response mode ranging from 1 to 5 (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). For this research, five hypotheses have been tested using the Pearson Correlation analysis. SPSS version 17 is used for primary data analysis.

Analysis and intepretation

The reliability test was used (Alpha Cronbach, $\alpha = 0.90$) before inferential analysis can be done to test for consistency and stability of the questionnaires. Analysis of Reliability can be shown in Table 1.

No.	Variables	Alpha Cronbach
1.	Communication Skills in SNSs	0.760
2.	Social Skill in SNSs	0.740
3.	Mind Skill in SNSs	0.755
4.	IT & Numeric Skill in SNSs	0.718
5.	Personal Attributes in SNSs	0.843

Table 1: Analysis of Reliability

The breakdown of demographic profile of graduates for this study is shown in Table 2.

Graduates' Profile	Frequency (n=50)
Gender	
Male	**20**
Female	**30**
Age	
20-22	**14**
23-25	**33**
Above 26	**3**
Current Semester of the Respondent	
Semester 2	**4**
Semester 3	**6**
Semester 4	**11**
Semester 5	**13**
Semester 6	**11**
Semester 7	**5**

Table 2: Demographic profile of graduates

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents that participated in the study according to the gender, age and their current semester. It shows that the majority of the respondent are in the age range 20-22 (28%), followed by the age of 23-25 (66%) and above 26 (6%). The respondents consist of female (60%) and male (40%). Out of 50 students, 26% are in semester 5, 22% are in semester 4 and 6 respectively.
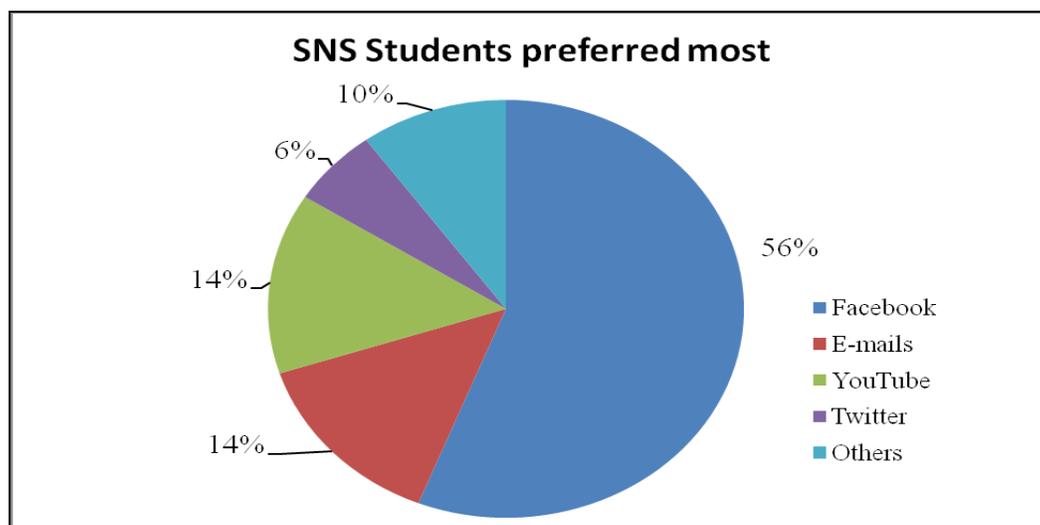

Figure 1: SNS students preferred most

Figure 1 shows that the highest SNS usage among respondents is Facebook (56%), followed by E-mail (14%), and YouTube (14%). Twitter has the lowest usage (6%).
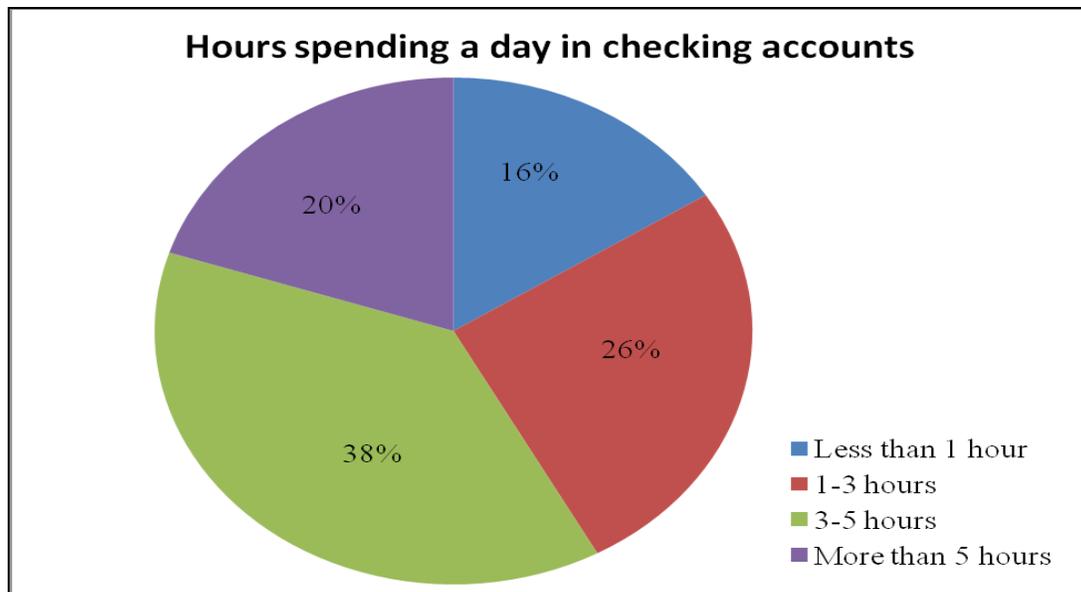
Figure 2: Hours spending a day in checking SNS accounts

Figure 2 shows the hours students spend to check their SNS accounts in a day, 38% of the respondents take 3-5 hours checking accounts, followed by 1-3 hours (26%). More than 5 hours (20%) and the lowest is less than an hour (16%).
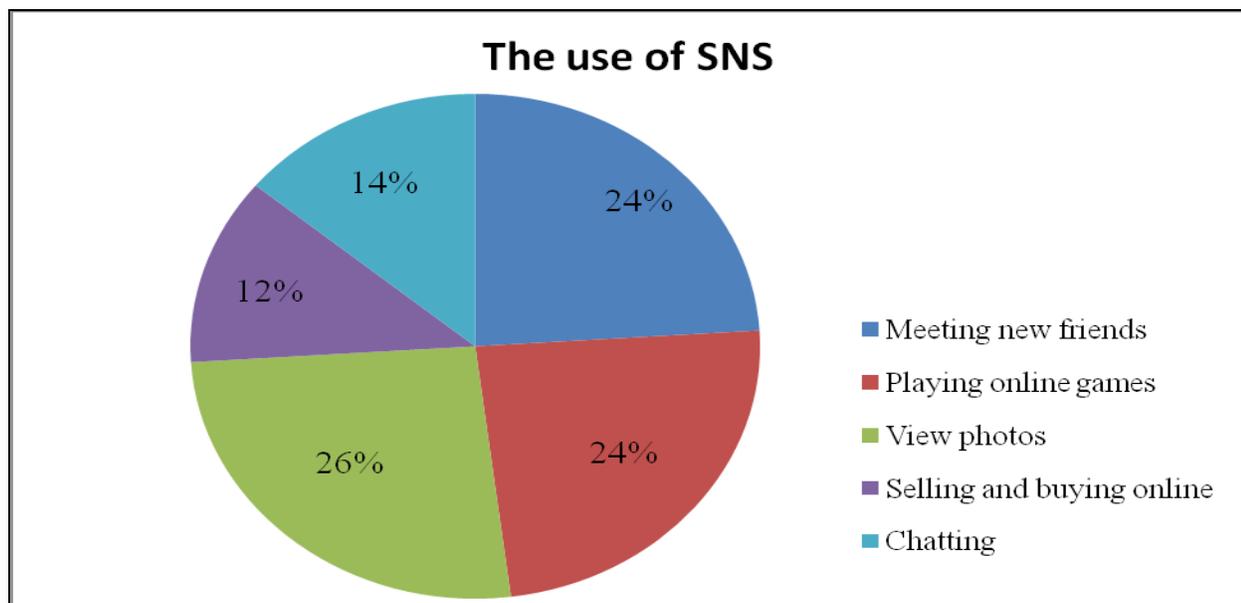

Figure 3: Students interest in SNSs

In Figure 3 above, students use SNSs to view photos (26%), meet new friends online (24%), and play online games (24%). 14% of respondents use SNSs to chat and only 12% use it to sell and buy things online.

Variables	Mean n=50
Communication skills	3.9080
Social skills	3.8350
Mind skills	3.5950
IT and Numeric skills	3.6333
Personal attribute skills	3.8900

Table 3: Analysis of mean for each variable

Table 3 shows the result of mean for five variables according to graduates responded in this study. Based on the findings, the highest mean score is 3.9080 for communication skills and the lowest is mind skill with means score of 3.5950.

Variables	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	Findings
Communications Skills	.290*	.041	H_1 is accepted
Social Skills	.281*	.048	H_1 is accepted
Mind Skills	.195	.174	H_1 is rejected
IT and Numeric Skills	.405*	.004	H_1 is accepted
Personal attribute Skills	.346*	.009	H_1 is accepted

Table 4: Analysis of significance relationship between communication skills, social skills, mind skills, IT & numeric skills, and personal & attribute skills in SNSs and students' soft skills development.

From Table 4 above, correlation reported that there is a positive relationship between the uses on SNSs and students' communication skills, social skills, IT & numeric skills and personal attribute skills development. The two-tail significance indicates that $p < 0.05$ and it is significance. Therefore, H_1 is accepted for communication skills, social skills, IT & numeric skills, and personal attribute skills in SNS. However, the result shows that there is no relationship between mind skills in SNSs and student soft skills development since its $p > 0.05$.

Discussion and recommendations

The five soft skills that are reviewed in this study are communication skills, social skills, IT & numeric skills, mind skills, and personal & attribute skills. These skills have been identified exist in the SNSs and each of them is tested to determine its relationship with the students' soft skills development.

For the hypotheses one: $p < 0.05$; H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. It was found that there is significant correlation between communication skills in SNSs and students' soft skills development. Lewis (2010) reported that social networking sites have enabled strategic communications to meet customers and strategic publics. All social networks nowadays provide functionality for communication and interaction in various ways (Boyd, 2009). In addition, it was found that some of the respondents use SNSs because it helps to improve students' English language while chatting with

friends abroad. SNSs not only help people to meet with many friends but also help to communicate with people who are already a part of their extended social network (Boyd, 2009).

The second hypotheses: $p < 0.05$; H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. There is a significant relationship between social skills in SNSs and students' soft skill development. As suggested by Ellison et al. (2007), Facebook helps student to maintain their social relationship among college students. While completing the questionnaire, some respondents in this study claimed they believe that SNSs can establish a good relationship between friends.

The third hypotheses: $p > 0.05$; H_0 is accepted and H_1 is rejected. There is no significant relationship between mind skills and students developing soft skills. It seems like students of KUIS disagree with Tynes (2005) who said that by playing online games and entering the online chatting rooms in SNSs can build creative thinking skills of students.

The fourth hypothesis: $p > 0.05$; H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. There is a significant relationship between IT & numeric skills in SNS and students' soft skills development. Information Technology and numeric skills can be created by the average person and can be shared with audience worldwide through blogs, YouTube, Flicker, MySpace and Facebook (Loretto, 2009).

Finally, the fifth hypotheses: $p > 0.05$; H_1 is accepted and H_0 is rejected. There is a significant relationship between personal attributes in SNS and students' soft skill development. Elgan (2009) stated that SNS has the ability to illuminate consensus, and surface all relevant views on the issue that students can share with cyber friends.

Thus, with the emergence of technology all over the world, students can utilize these SNSs to assist them in their learning process and can develop their soft skills as well. Parents should not prohibit their children from using SNSs as it is proven in this study that SNSs still can help in some ways developing soft skills. However, parents should always monitor their children on the contents viewed by their children in SNSs. With the fastest changing of technology, particularly the SNSs, students are expected to be able to develop and improve their soft skills to ensure that they can have sufficient skills as required by employers.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study shows that there is significant relationship between the four skills namely as communication skills, social skills, IT & numeric skills, and personal attributes and students' soft skills development. However, mind skills in SNSs are found to have no significant relationship with the development of students' soft skills.

The results of this study can contribute towards positive perspective of using SNSs among students especially higher education level students. Those who frequently use the SNSs should be able to use SNSs wisely since not all contents of SNSs give positive impact to students.

Limitations
There will be limitations in doing this research that need to be acknowledged. One of the limitations of this study could be due to limited articles and journal relating to the relationship between SNSs and soft skills. The low sample size may not represent the whole population.

It is suggested that further studies need to be conducted with large sample size to determine more soft skills in SNSs that can be used to develop soft skills required by employers from graduates.

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