

Social Media Literacy and Awareness among the Students in Multidisciplinary Programs in a Thai Private University

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Abstract

This paper reports research findings on the social media literacy, and the level of awareness from 123 students in three multidisciplinary programs in a Thai private university. The study used a survey questionnaire to collect data. The surveys were conducted in January-February 2017. The students participating in the study were from three undergraduate programs in Enterprise Information Systems (EIS), Investment Informatics (INI), and Medical Informatics (MEI) programs. The researchers explored four levels of the media literacy framework on *access, analyze, evaluate and create*. The results revealed that the students understand how to learn and apply social media literacy as stated in the media literacy framework. Nearly all strongly agreed that social media has an impact on their everyday life. They also strongly agreed that social media is one of the communication tools for connecting resources and Facebook as the most popular social media application. Other findings revealed their gender, year levels, and GPA of the students having statistical significance in impact on their awareness of social media literacy, but not on their knowledge of social media and programs of study.

Keywords: *Social media literacy, awareness, multidisciplinary programs, Thai private university*

1. Introduction

Social media has been a dominant platform that alters self-awareness in Thailand. According to Seubsom & Meeplat (2016), social media has an ability to raise interactions in a community within a virtual environment which facilitates the creation, sharing and exchange of contents with other members. Moreover, social media is also emerged as a widely accepted method for providing new sources of information. The origin of social media in Thailand was dated back to 1995 when the Internet became commercialized. "Talk on Unix," "Pirch," "ICQ," "QQ," and "MSN or Windows Live Messenger" were once, five of the most popular social media applications in Thailand (Jantavongso & Daenglim, 2017). In 2017, Thailand is ranked the 9th in terms of the growth of social media users. Forty-six of 68.2 million (67%) has active social media accounts. Facebook is the top active social platform, followed by YouTube, Line, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram (Kemp, 2017a). Thus, Bangkok is also a city with the largest number of active Facebook users (Kemp, 2017b). Moreover, there are 41 million LINE users in Thailand with the current growth rate of +30% (Leesa-nguansuk, 2017). Thailand is ranked the 2nd place in the world with most LINE users after Japan (Jantavongso & Daenglim, 2017).

Accordingly, Greenhow (2011) conducted a survey focusing on the domains of social media and educational contexts. The initial results revealed that social media provides direct and indirect supports for learning as well as stimulates social and civic benefits, both online and offline—thus having positive implications for education. Similar findings pointed to social media increasing active participation of students in the social life during school hours. Almu and Buhari (2014). It was also reported that Facebook is the most frequently used by students and there is an increase in the use of social media in the educational setting. While social media can provide a number of benefits for students in their learning, teachers are also able to create learning contents, encourage debates and discussions among students. Seubsom & Meeplat (2016) emphasized that almost all students used social media. The present issue of social media in an education context is not only about its benefits, but also the negative or positive impacts on students' studies. This in turn leads to decrease or increase in the students' academic performance. Occasionally, students may not be aware of, or unable to process, the information provided (Seubsom & Meeplat, 2016).

This study was to find out about the perception and awareness of the social media literacy of 123 undergraduate students from the multidisciplinary programs in a private Thai university. The specific objectives are to investigate the impact of (1) gender, (2) year levels; (3) GPA, and (4) programs of study on the students' knowledge and awareness of social media literacy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Media

A speedy increase in the number of social media users as well as an advancement of social media technology have been recognized by the public. Social media embraces technologies such as new media, digitalizing, and social networking. The dominance of social media at present has relatively shaped the way people perceive and understand their world. Social media has evolved as a result of Web 2.0 concepts and new media technologies (Jantavongso, 2013). People around the world are currently interacting with each other through social media networking to communicate their shared interests and activities, and disseminate information. Moreover, social media, especially Facebook and Twitter have become enormously popular across demography of race, age and gender, and have billions of users. This implies that social media has now become important parts of the way people communicate and share a wide variety of information. For this reason, social media truly has a wealth of information (Jantavongso, 2013).

Well-known Facebook and Twitter for many people are considered social media. Despite this assertion, the first recognizable social media provider was “SixDegrees.com” launched in 1997. The “SixDegrees.com” site allowed users to create their profiles and list their friends. The “SixDegrees.com” site promoted itself as a tool to assist people to connect with and send messages to others. Although the “SixDegrees.com” site had attracted millions of users, it was unable to sustain. The “SixDegrees.com” site closed in 2000 (Ellison, 2007).

Social media in Thailand is slightly different. Use of social media is mainly emphasized with Facebook and LINE Chat applications. Moreover, LINE, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are the main social media applications in Thailand. Whereas social media has a very board meaning, there is no single, universally applied definition (Jantavongso, 2015). This study applied the social media definition of the study by Jantavongso (2013) as “social interaction through the use of applications on available tools, many of which are the Internet-based.” Furthermore, these applications include Facebook, Twitter, LINE, LinkedIn, Google Plus, Blogs, WhatsApp, Tango, WeChat,

Instagram, YouTube, and SKOUT. Social media can form relationships and create social networks. Therefore, social media has not only changed the way students and teachers communicate but also the way they socialize. Social media has now become an essential element of many education providers in Thailand.

2.2 Social Media Literacy

While *media literacy* literature offers a body of work that is “rich” and “fruitful,” it is yet difficult to define (Livingstone, 2014). Media literacy is an understanding of the role of a media society. A commonly accepted definition is that media literacy refers to the capacity to access, understand, evaluate and create communication across a variety of contexts (Lunt & Livingstone, 2009; Vanwynsberghe, Boudry & Verdegem, 2012; Livingstone, 2014; Leesa-nguansuk, 2017). Media literacy is a major educational and research activity and has been developed from the critical evaluation of mass media (Vanwynsberghe, Boudry & Verdegem, 2012). On the other hand, social media literacy refers to the competences needed to deal with social media. The social media literacy deals with production, creation, communication, collaboration and transaction of media content at the time social media being Internet-based applications (Vanwynsberghe, Boudry & Verdegem, 2012). Therefore, using social media requires more action or active engagement of the users. This study followed the working definition of social media literacy as “the competences of individuals to appropriately apply social media applications and to **critical analyze, evaluate, share, and create** social media content.”

2.3 Social Media Awareness

Following the definition by Seubsom and Meeplat (2016) and Cambridge University Press (2017), *social media awareness* is the ability to directly know and perceive to feel or to be conscious of events, objects, thoughts, emotions, or sensory patterns via social media. Therefore, this study examined the social media awareness of undergraduate students from three multidisciplinary programs in a private university in Thailand.

3. Research Methodology

This section explains the research methodology employed in this study. This study is a non-experimental, quantitative research applying a survey approach which follows approaches to research and scholarship used by Shanks Arnott & Rouse, 1993). The questionnaire technique was selected to collect data. The technique allows the participants to freely address the questions, ensures anonymity in their convenient time and location. Moreover, the survey approach is the most frequently used as an empirical research method in information technology research (Shanks, Arnott & Rouse, 1993).

3.1 The Participants

The participants were 123 students in the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Programs in Enterprise Information Systems (EIS), Investment Informatics (INI), and Medical Informatics (MEI), in a private universality located in Pathumthani province, Thailand. The participants were informed in person about data collection during their classes and through social networks. The data were collected during January-February 2017.

3.2 The Instrument

The instrument consists of two sections to obtain responses from the students. The first section collects demographic information. It includes gender, year levels, Grade Point Average (GPA), and study programs. The second section consists of items measuring social media literacy and social media awareness based on four steps of the social media literacy working definition. The four steps are: (1) the ability to critically analyze information through social media, (2) the ability to evaluate information through social media when reading or seeing the information, (3) the ability to share information through social media, and (4) the ability to create new information from social media.

The second section is to obtain the participants' opinions with the Likert-type questions. The Likert-type items allow students to indicate their responses by selecting statements on a continuum, ranging from 'strongly not agreeing' to 'strongly agreeing'. The points can be given to the various responses and measured of central tendency variability, and correlation; other standard statistical measures can be calculated as needed. In this study, only the five-point Likert-type scale was used. It comprised of the following numerical codes: 1 = 'strongly not agreed', 2 = 'not agreed', 3 = 'neutral', 4 = 'agreed', and 5 = 'strongly agreed'.

The instrument was content-validated by three ICT experts using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) to rate individual items on the degree to which they 'do' or 'do not' measure specific objectives. Each expert measured each item by giving the item a rating of '1' for clearly measuring, '0' for unclear measuring, and '-1' for not measuring by each objective. Item rates above 0.5 were included (Turner, Mulvenon, Thomas & Balkin, 2002).

3.3 Data Analysis Methods

The descriptive statistical techniques were used to describe the participants in terms of frequencies, means, and standard deviations. This was to allow the researchers to characterize the participants in the study. The inferential statistical techniques with F statistic were to assess the overall statistical significance of the findings.

4. Research Findings

Section 4 reports details of research findings.

4.1 Characteristics of the Participants

One hundred and twenty-three students were from the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Programs in Enterprise Information Systems (EIS), Investment Informatics (INI), and Medical Informatics (MEI). Table 1 presents the participants' demographic variables.

Table 1: The Participant's Demographic Variables

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	51	41.46
	Female	72	58.54
Year Levels	Freshman	32	26.02
	Sophomore	40	32.52
	Junior	51	41.46
	Senior	NA	NA
GPA	< 2.00	3	2.44
	2.01 – 2.50	24	19.51
	2.51 – 3.00	35	28.46
	> 3.00	61	49.59

		Frequency	Percentage
Programs	EIS	50	40.65
	INI	31	25.20
	MEI	42	34.15
Total		123	100.00

4.2 Knowledge about Social Media

Table 2 shows the means of the students' knowledge about social media. The majority had strongly agreed (83.7%) that social media has the impact on their everyday life. 74.8% of the students strongly agreed that social media is one of the communication tools for connecting people around the globe. 76.4% of the students strongly agreed that social media can be used for chatting with their friends. Facebook is the most popular social media application, agreed by most of the students (74%). Line application is known to the students (72.4%) for chatting with friends.

Table 2: Knowledge about Social Media in Percentage

	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Not agreed	Strongly not Agreed
1.Social media has an impact on everyday life	83.7	9.8	4.1	0.8	1.6
2.Social media is a communication tool for connecting people	74.8	16.3	8.9	0.	0
3.Social media is used for chatting with friends	76.4	17.1	4.9	1.6	0
4.Facebook is the most popular social media application	74.0	12.2	11.4	2.4	0
5. Line application is for chatting with friends	72.4	17.9	7.3	1.6	0.8

Table 3 shows the overall level of awareness and social media literacy from the students. For example, there are students (80.5%) not agreeing when seeing advertisements about free programs, while a few (8.1%) not sure and some (11.4%) agreed. The majority of students (91.1%) thought that advertisements on Facebook are not true, 3.3% not sure and 5.7% believing them as true.

Table 3: The Levels of Awareness and Social Media Literacy

	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Not Agreed	Strongly not Agreed
1. Students should click on the websites that offered the free programs/ software/applications	4.9	6.5	8.1	29.3	51.2
2. Students straight away believe in an advertisement for tablets on Facebook	2.4	3.3	3.3	35.8	55.3
3. Student should give their addresses and telephone numbers to an online friend	2.4	4.9	6.5	33.3	52.8
4. Students should not read a message sent from an unknown person due to a computer risk involved	56.9	25.2	16.3	1.6	0
5. Students must notify their parents if someone is harassing them on the chat room	64.2	28.5	4.1	2.4	0.8
6. Students should send their photos when requested from an online person	62.2	31.7	4.9	0.8	0
7. Students should behave in a proper manner when using social media	35.0	46.3	10.6	6.5	1.6
8. Students should remain silent when finding a person with questionable behavior or who may be potentially harmful to others due to the potential danger to themselves.	4.9	15.4	19.5	31.1	28.5
9. Students should not use	49.6	32.5	14.6	3.3	0
10. Students should be posting comments on Facebook when feeling stress or having problems	8.1	7.3	10.6	26.8	47.2

4.2 Impact of Gender, Year levels, GPA, Study Programs on the Knowledge and Awareness of Social Media Literacy

The average from gender, year levels, GPA, study programs, knowledge and awareness was calculated and the results from the Pearson Correlation (p) test are presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Correlation Results

		Gender	Year	GPA	Programs	Knowledge	Awareness
	Pearson	1	-.064	0.210*	-.057	-.073	-.065
	Correlation						
Gender	Sig. (2-tailed)		.483	.020	.534	.419	.472
	N	123	123	123	123	123	123
Year	Pearson	-.064	1	.097	.037	.035	-.093
Level	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.483		.285	.683	.703	.309
	N	123	123	123	123	123	123
GPA	Pearson	.210*	.097	1	-.121	-.137	.009
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.285		.181	.131	.925
	N	123	123	123	123	123	123
Programs	Pearson	-.057	.037	-.121	1	.258**	.017
	Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.534	.683	.181		.004	.850
	N	123	123	123	123	123	123

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 presents the difference in knowledge of social media by gender. The table reports the means and standard deviations as follows: the male (Mean = 4.682, S.D. = .351) and female (Mean = 4.625, S.D. = .409). The result shows the t-value of .405 and the p-value at .419. Therefore, the knowledge of social media of the male and female students is not statistically significant at the p-value at .419. The result indicated that gender of the students has no impact on their knowledge of social media.

Table 5: The Impact of Gender on Knowledge of Social Media

	Mean	S.D.	t	p-Value
Male	4.682	.351	.405	.419
Female	4.625	.409		

Table 6 presents the difference among the participants regarding the relationship between gender and social media literacy awareness. The table presents the male (Mean = 2.852, S.D. = .385) and female (Mean = 2.805, S.D. = .338). The result shows the t-value at .721 and p-value at .472. Therefore, the relationship between gender and awareness of social media literacy is not statistically significant at the level of p-value at .05.

Table 6: The Impact of Gender on Social Media Literacy Awareness

	Mean	S.D.	t	p-Value
Male	2.852	.385	.721	.472
Female	2.805	.338		

The F Statistic is used to determine whether the means of knowledge of social media vary significantly between the year levels, GPA, and study programs.

Table 7: The Impact of Year Levels, GPA, and Study Programs on Knowledge of Social Media

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Year Levels	2.762	8	.345	.509	.847
	77.303	114	.678		
	76.748	122			
GPA	3.562	8	.445	.593	.782
	85.625	114	.751		
	89.187	122			
Programs	13.997	8	1.750	3.178	.003
	62.751	114	.550		
	76.748	122			

Table 7 shows the F value of the programs at 3.178 with Sig. = .003. The results of the test indicates that there is a significant difference in the study programs and knowledge of social media. The year levels [F =.509, Sig. = .847] and the GPA [F =.593, Sig. = .782] are not statistically significant.

The F Statistic is also used to determine whether the means of awareness of social media literacy vary significantly between the year levels, GPA, and study programs.

Table 8 indicates that there is no significant difference among the year levels, GPA, study programs and awareness of social media literacy.

Table 8: The Impact of Year Levels, GPA, and Study Programs on Awareness of Social Media Literacy

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Year Levels	16.810	109	.885	.1441	.822
	63.255	103	.614		
	80.065	122			
GPA	19.212	109	1.011	1.488	.125
	69.975	103	.679		
	89.187	122			
Programs	8.660	109	.456	.690	.822
	68.088	103	.661		
	76.748	122			

5. Conclusion

This study examined social media literacy and awareness of the undergraduate students from three multidisciplinary programs in a private university in Thailand. Most of these students understand how to learn and apply social media literacy at four levels: critically analyze, evaluate, share, and create social media contents. The majority of students strongly agreed that social media has an impact on their everyday life. Most of the students strongly agreed that social media is one of the communication tools for connecting people around the globe. Whereas, the findings revealed that gender, year levels, and GPA of the participating students had no impact on their knowledge of social media; and the study programs did play a significant role. In contrast, the difference in gender, year levels, GPA, and study programs among the students in this research had no impact on their awareness of social media literacy. The research findings clearly shed light on Thai undergraduate students in their social media perception and use of social media as reported in this paper.

6. The Authors

Assistant Professor Dr Suttisak Jantavongso and Assistant Professor Chuleekorn Nuansomsri are full-time staff members of the College of Digital Innovation and Information Technology, Rangsit University. Both share research interest in the areas of ITC literacy, digital citizenship and innovations in information technology.

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