

An Investigation of Utilising Hashtags to Enhance Teaching and Learning Experiences among Art Students

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the visibility of students' artwork by utilising hashtags as a management tool to enhance their teaching and learning experiences. This study uses primary data analysis from 269 arts students from various universities in Malaysia who were randomly chosen. The questionnaires were distributed at these universities/colleges and sent online for the respondents to participate in the questionnaire. The data was analysed based on descriptive analysis such as frequency counts, validity and means by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Based on the preliminary study, students have indicated that they prefer the lecturers to incorporate social media in their teaching and learning as they found it more relaxing and entertaining. By encouraging students to include hashtags to label their artworks via social media, the visibility of their artwork will be enhanced thus improving the chance for them to be discovered by potential employers. This paper concludes that by using hashtags, there is a significantly high level of potential for teaching and learning to be a more fun and engaging learning experience where students connect, share their artworks, gather ideas and receive comments from a wider audience including their peers, artists or even experts in the field.

Keywords: *Hashtag, social media, e-learning, art, teaching, learning.*

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of technology nowadays has made it possible for almost all university students to own a smartphone with internet connection especially to access social media platforms. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of university students are subscribers of social media accounts namely Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on. According to Kumloglu et al (2010), this fast-paced mobility of technology somehow has influenced the routines of the mobile phone consumers. The use of hashtags whenever they post something on social media is one of the outcomes from this current reality. A hashtag is a short link followed by the pound (#) sign. Miles, (2010) as cited in Hashtag Retrieval in a Microblogging Environment said that hashtag helps someone to broadcast brief textual messages to others who are interested in a certain topic and it made it easier to find a content on the same topic for example #yolo, #sunset,

#livedrawing and so on. Furthermore, Lee (2015) mentioned that posts with hashtag will result in double amounts of clicks, retweets, favourites and replies than posts without hashtags. In the meantime, the system that supports the online teaching-learning in university for example in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak is only restricted to students and lecturers where the artwork submitted cannot be accessed by other people. There are no official ways to broadcast students' artwork online so far. In addition, students tend to lose their artwork throughout their studies because most of them do not have proper documentation of their artwork especially during the first year of study. Hence, this research aims to improve the visibility of students' artwork by utilising hashtags as a form of management tool to enhance their teaching and learning experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching & Learning

Learning does not only involve new skills, understanding specific topics or courses as it is about changing an attitude. Good educators nurture their knowledge and skills through constant and deliberate efforts. One of the pre-requisites to be a good educator is to understand the teaching and learning process in greater depth. Educators tend to think that teaching is all about their roles, in fact, the most significant aspects of the educational process are the students and what they learn (Sequeira, 2012).

The landscape and pattern of teaching and learning needs to be transformed in order to create a more fun learning space and engage with students' learning experiences. One example includes opening the classroom scale towards online or virtual class to bring them a step closer towards becoming more self-directed learners and increase the potential for them to develop the skills they need (Devi et al., 2019). The challenge in a new learning space is to provide opportunities for learners to think through problems, have group collaborations and work out innovative solutions using technology and remain open to other possibilities and alternatives to adapt to pedagogical strategies which are new and exciting possibilities for teaching and learning experiences.

Social Media

New spaces not only influence students' attitudes, level of engagement and learning experience but also lead to better academic performance (Byers et al., 2014). Nowadays, teaching and learning process has evolved due to the development in technology. Teaching and learning become more flexible and accessible through social media. The practice of social media is on the rise within education, both outside and inside the classroom (Blaschke, 2014). The use of social media in an appropriate manner and proper guidance can lead to enhancements in teaching and learning experiences through a better process of communication, interaction and cooperation on social network.

Multimedia and online materials help to design a new way of learning that is more interesting and enhances student attention in class. Students in turn were more focused and engaged in the collaborative tasks and reported developing better peer relationships and learning from each other (Devi et al., 2019). Students have great interest in social media. Social media is defined as Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Twitter, MySpace, or LinkedIn (Wang et al., 2011). The most popular social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Instagram and Google Doc as they allow users to communicate directly with others. Another point to note is that these social media platforms are now playing a great and powerful decision-making role be it economically, politically, socially and educationally (Devi et al., 2019).

Therefore, social media has been shown to have a positive influence towards learner hence making the process of teaching and learning more meaningful. Social networking tools can provide opportunities for students to find information, collect their own material, communicate and interact towards each other. In addition, in order to integrate the technology in pedagogically meaningful ways, educators need to explore new teaching and learning theories as nowadays more educators integrate social media in their classroom (Mutalib et al., 2015). Hence, by using social media, teaching and learning does not only become feasible and cost-effective, but it has become an active engagement, effective, pedagogical improvement and interactive between educators and students. Learning experiences also get wider audiences including peers, artists or even experts to watch or evaluate educator's teaching modules and styles and student's learning outcomes such as portfolios and their skills.

Hashtag

Social media has created new forms of communication and interaction with the community. One of the most innovative tools is the hashtag (#tag). Hashtags are examples of folksonomy, a term invented by Van der Val in 2004 to designate any label (or "tag") that helps in the process of indexing and retrieval of online content. Then, the hash (#) symbol has a long heritage throughout the computer age (Salazar, 2017). Hashtags indicate topics or themes, and they represent an important innovation in social media communication. The use of hashtags is powerful because it is participatory and not decided in advance by a pre-determined set of users (Saxton et al., 2015). Therefore, the topics or issues can be anything and initiate discussions that generate interest.

It becomes widespread and a new currency because seemingly it improves clickthrough rates (CTR) on Twitter, becomes links to search queries, makes someone or something gets found by its target audience much easier, provides a way to gain more followers and generates buzz (Salazar, 2017). It is easy, informal and feasible to the community and simultaneously brings big influence among society. The use of hashtag in social media is important for multiple reasons. Either by using it personally to generate interest or as an organisation to promote, establish themselves and deliver messages. It can be used to help determine what message points are reverberating among targeted audiences. These messages then can be used in other encouragement efforts to repeat key messages to prompt further interactivity and engagement for the issue (Saxton et al., 2015). In a nutshell, hashtags have become universal in everyday discussion and conversation, sharing information, experiences and moments that are very established and sociable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Instrument

The questionnaire consists of 3 sections with 10 closed-ended and 9 statements. Section A gathers the demographic data of respondents which include gender, university/college and year of study. Meanwhile, Section B contains 7 multiple-choice questions where respondents must answer 'yes' or 'no' and 1 open-ended question. There are 9 statements in Section C with a set of close-ended 1-5 Likert-scale questionnaire. Levels of agreement are indicated based on 5 points from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

Procedure for Data Collection

A survey was conducted among art students in various universities in Malaysia of which these students were randomly chosen. The questionnaires were spread at the universities/colleges and sent online for the respondents to participate in the questionnaire.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The data was analysed based on descriptive analysis such as frequency counts, validity and means by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Sample for Data Collection

A total of 269 arts student completed the online questionnaire. There were more female (61.3%) than male students (38.7%) who answered the questionnaire. Several universities offering art subject have been identified to become the respondent of this study. The universities/colleges that participated were Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Sabah Creative Content Centre, UiTM Shah Alam, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa, Kolej Yayasan Melaka, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Widad University College, University College Sabah Foundation, International College Yayasan Melaka, Cosmopoint College Sabah and UiTM Kelantan. The years of study range from Year 1 to Year 5 with most respondents fell under the second year of study (38.7%). Table 1 shows a demographic profile of the respondents with frequencies and valid (%) readings.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Frequency	Valid (%)
Gender		
Male	105	38.7%
Female	164	61.3%
	269	100
University/College		
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak	186	68.8%
Universiti Malaysia Sabah	26	9.3%
Sabah Creative Content Centre	12	4.5%
UiTM Shah Alam	4	1.5%
Universiti Islam Antarabangsa	19	7.1%
Kolej Yayasan Melaka	11	4.1%
Universiti Putra Malaysia	1	0.4%
Widad University College	4	1.5%
University College Sabah Foundation	3	1.1%
International College Yayasan Melaka	1	0.4%
Cosmopoint College Sabah	1	0.4%
UiTM Kelantan	1	0.4%
	269	100
Year of Study		
First Year	73	27.1%
Second Year	104	38.7%
Third Year	63	23.4%
Fourth Year	21	7.8%
Fifth Year	8	3%
	269	100

Notes: N= 269

FINDINGS

The findings were summarised to show an overview of the frequency and validity of the usage of hashtags among art students in various universities/colleges in Malaysia.

The table below was summarised based on frequency, percent, valid percent and cumulative percent from Section B and C in the questionnaire.

Section B

Question 1: Do you own any social media account?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	269	100	100	100
No	0	0	0	100
Total	269	100	100	

Question 2: If yes, please indicate which of the following social media platforms you use:

Social Media Platform Used	Frequency	Valid (%)
Facebook	241	89.6
Instagram	233	86.6
Twitter	114	42.4
Google+	111	41.3
LinkedIn	15	5.6

*Students could choose more than one option.

Question 3: Do you post any of your artwork on social media?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	219	81.4	81.4	81.4
No	50	18.6	18.6	100
Total	269	100	100	

Question 4. Do you usually get many likes for the posts that you update?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	176	65.4	65.4	65.4
No	93	34.6	34.6	100
Total	269	100	100	

Question 5: Do you use hashtags when you upload your artwork on social media?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	174	64.7	64.7	64.7
No	95	35.3	35.3	100
Total	269	100	100	

Question 6. If yes, how often do you use hashtags?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Whenever I feel like using	154	57.2	57.2	57.2
When I think my artwork is good	72	26.7	26.7	83.9
In every post	43	16.1	16.1	100
Total	269	100	100	

Question 7: Have you seen a noticeable increase in followers/likes/retweets from a hashtag that you post?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	186	69.1	69.1	69.1
No	83	30.9	30.9	100
Total	269	100	100	

Section C

Statement 1: Posts with hashtags will result in double the amount of clicks, retweets, favourites and replies than posts without them.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	9	3.3	3.3	3.3
Disagree	14	5.2	5.2	8.5
Neutral	111	41.3	41.3	49.8
Agree	91	33.8	33.8	83.6
Strongly Agree	44	16.4	16.4	100
Total	269	100	100	

Statement 2: It is believed that by using hashtags, it gives more fun and engaging learning experiences where you can connect, share your artwork, gather ideas and get comments from a wider audience including peers, artists or even experts.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	7	2.6	2.6	2.6
Disagree	8	3	3	5.6
Neutral	73	27.1	27.1	32.7
Agree	120	44.6	44.6	77.3
Strongly Agree	61	22.7	22.7	100
Total	269	100	100	

Statement 3: Hashtags will surge the visibility of your artwork, improving chances for you to be discovered by potential employers.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	1.5	1.5	1.5
Disagree	10	3.7	3.7	5.2
Neutral	77	28.6	28.6	33.8
Agree	111	41.3	41.3	75.1
Strongly Agree	67	24.9	24.9	100
Total	269	100	100	

Statement 4: By posting artwork with hashtags, it helps for a proper documentation of your artwork management where it is easier for you and your lecturers to track back your past work at-a-glance.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	1.9	1.5	1.5
Disagree	6	2.2	3.7	5.2
Neutral	71	26.4	28.6	33.8
Agree	117	43.5	41.3	75.1
Strongly Agree	70	26	24.9	100
Total	269	100	100	

Statement 5: Hashtags are convenient for class discussions on general or specific subjects, send and receive general announcements from lecturers to students and among students.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	1.9	1.9	1.9
Disagree	16	5.9	5.9	7.8
Neutral	92	34.2	34.2	42
Agree	107	39.8	39.8	81.8
Strongly Agree	49	18.2	18.2	100
Total	269	100	100	

Statement 6: Lecturers and students can monitor the discussion happening around a specific topic just by searching a specific customised hashtag for a deeper research.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	8	3	3	3
Disagree	14	5.2	5.2	8.2
Neutral	74	27.5	27.5	35.7
Agree	117	43.5	43.5	79.2
Strongly Agree	56	20.8	20.8	100
Total	269	100	100	

Statement 7: Personalised hashtag is like an ever-ready portfolio for you to show to your potential employers anytime and anywhere.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	1.9	1.9	1.9
Disagree	13	4.8	4.8	6.7
Neutral	77	28.6	28.6	35.3
Agree	129	48	48	83.3
Strongly Agree	45	16.7	16.7	100
Total	269	100	100	

Statement 8: Hashtags help to improve the visibility and share the contents of your artwork worldwide.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	2.2	2.2	2.2
Disagree	6	2.2	2.2	4.4
Neutral	59	21.9	21.9	26.3
Agree	126	46.8	46.8	73.1
Strongly Agree	72	26.8	26.8	100

Total	269	100	100	
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Statement 9: Hashtags help optimising your social media presence.

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	1.5	1.5	1.5
Disagree	9	3.3	3.3	4.8
Neutral	73	27.1	27.1	31.9
Agree	124	46.1	46.1	78
Strongly Agree	59	21.9	21.9	100
Total	269	100	100	

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to improve the visibility and sharing content of students' artwork worldwide by creating a dynamic space for the students to share their artwork. In the meantime, based on the results, it aims to propose to the educators on how to improve students' teaching and learning experiences by incorporating hashtags and social media.

From the results above, it is exciting to note that all of the respondents own a social media account. Considering this, it will be easier if the educators plan to incorporate the teaching and learning activities using social media with Facebook (89.6%) which recorded the largest number of social media account owned by the respondents. 81.4% of the respondents revealed that they post their artwork on social media and 65.4% indicated that they received many likes for the post that they updated.

Interestingly, 64.7 % of the respondents revealed that they use hashtag when they upload the artwork on social media and 69.1% claimed they have seen a noticeable increase in followers/likes/retweets from a hashtag that they post. This shows a very positive impact if they are serious in broadcasting their artwork to gain attention from the public or most importantly their future employers.

In response to the statement, an overall majority of the statements scored more than 60% in the descriptors 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. With this, we can conclude that by utilising hashtags to improve the visibility of student's artwork and as management tools, students can expect to receive positive and encouraging responses. Therefore, this is a good opportunity for educators to incorporate this method by encouraging the students to include personalised and meaningful hashtags when they upload their artwork on their social media accounts. In addition, it will surge the visibility of the students' artwork, thus improving chances for them to be discovered by potential employers. Additionally, by posting artwork with hashtags, it also helps to create a proper documentation of the students' artwork management where it is easier for the students to track back their past work at-a-glance.

CONCLUSION

It is believed that by using hashtags, students gain a more fun and engaging learning experience where they connect, share their artwork, gather ideas and get comments and exposure from a wider audience including peers, artists or even experts. While the figures are preliminary, it is nonetheless believed that by creating their customised hashtags for the artwork, it will help them to manage their files of artwork. It is like an ever-ready portfolio for them to show to their potential employers anytime and anywhere. Thus, the results from this study are significantly valuable for the educators who would like to try active learning in their teaching and learning.

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