

White Paper on Social Networks in Higher Education

Prepared by: Munirah Muhamad, UrekaLabs Sdn. Bhd.

www.urekalabs.com

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1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a profile within a bounded system, and interact with other users publicly with whom they share a connection.

Humans are social creatures. With rare exception, we strive to relate, converse and connect with others. Social networking promotes online communities of interests and activities that promote connections between users in a more open and robust manner than simple e-mail.

1.1 SUCCESS OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

Online social networking is a trend that has drastically changed the landscape of how people connect and socialise with each other. They provide a foundation in which society reacts to new ideas through the viewpoints and opinions of others; sharing ideas and stories; finding inspiration and information relative to each particular interests, desires, and ambitions.

Through the advertence of the social networking trend is the birth of thousands upon thousands of “groups”. It is natural for members of a social network to develop groups where all participants can discuss and learn collaboratively. These groups/communities will be help desks, mentoring teams, cohort groups, debate clubs. This is peer-learning, learning through collaboration and discussion. (Douglas Karr, 2008)

Social networking and education has found its circles meshed. According to a new study from Grunwald Associates LLC conducted in cooperation with the (USA) National School Boards Association, online social networking is now so deeply embedded in the lifestyles of teens that it rivals television for their attention. Further, students report that one of the most common topics of conversation on the social networking scene is education. Almost 60 percent of students who use social networking talk about education topics online and, surprisingly, more than 50 percent talk specifically about schoolwork. (Joshlyn Foreman, 2008)

1.2 CONCERNS OVER SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

With the success of the social network sites phenomena also come the inconvenient disadvantages:

1.1.1. Awkward Social Connections

The success of social network sites like Facebook's exponential growth meant a collapse in social contexts: users had to face their employers, employees, lecturers, colleagues, classmates alongside their close family and friends.

To send a message via Friendster for instance from a lecturer to a student may seem inappropriate – Facebook and social network is still considered a personal space whereas a virtual learning environment is work and study related.

1.1.2. Data Mining

The dangers of posting sensitive personal information on public social-networking sites are well known, but a researcher has now revealed how data mining these sites can dig up undisclosed personal information and sensitive business information. (Nitesh Dhanjani, 2009)

1.1.3. Games (Time Wastage)

There are more than 50,000 applications available for Facebook and a huge percentage of those are games. The top 10 games on the site have more than 12 million active users each. (Laura Khalil, 2010)

1.1.4. Viruses and Malware

This threat is often overlooked by users. Hackers are attracted to social networking sites because of the relative ease in committing fraud as well as launching spam and malware attacks. As of March 2010, McAfee published a finding that revealed a scam targeted against Facebook users which had quite a significant success. The state of affairs clearly shows an issue that still is not being sufficiently addressed by private individuals as well as companies. (Michael Lind Mortensen, 2010)

1.1.5. Privacy and Content Ownership

Your data is hosted in a foreign land. Terms and Conditions changes and you find yourself at their disposition.

1.3 ISSUES OF CURRENT EDUCATIONAL ONLINE SYSTEMS

Communities naturally form as an extension of the interactions users share in online environments. However, most available online systems that provides for the campus framework usually lack the avenue that supports a wide participation and collaboration among its users.

This condition forces both lecturers and students especially to look for services outside of available online systems provided by the campus to hold discussions and create groups, e.g. Clubs and societies utilising services such as Yahoo! Groups etc. to manage their events.

Communities are therefore existing outside the realm of the campus' educational online system. Rather than having these groups form randomly and scattered everywhere on the internet, an internal social network such as KOLUNI by UREKALABS SDN. BHD. provides a platform where discussions are brought back into a centralised environment for a tighter communal bond. Users are able to socialise with other users even when they are unable to gather in unmediated situations.

Most available educational systems hardly support sociability. There is a need for a central system that allows the campus community to interact, socialise, discuss, collaborate and promote their activities.

1.4 AVAILABLE LITERATURE ON TOPIC

The following pages provide additional background and motivation:

- <http://www.zdnet.com/blog/igeneration/colleges-continue-to-embrace-social-networking-for-teaching-really/4432>
- <http://www.interfolio.com/blog/post.cfm/internal-social-networks-at-colleges-and-universities-a-new-trend>
- <http://www.academicagroup.ca/node/5887>
- <http://flatclassroomproject.ning.com/>
- <http://webtrendsng.com/blog/press-release-skoola-a-nigeria-educational-social-networking-site-launched/>

2. RISKS AND REWARDS

2.1 RISKS

The world of the internal social network is the opposite of command & control. That said, reasonable guidelines, a group of informal influencers, and a posse of community managers help keep the dialogue lively and the network on track.

- **Negative feedback**

Having a conversation up front about participation guidelines (more on this below) is a good start, as well as outlining your expectations for professional behavior on internal social tools. If you already have more private feedback mechanisms in place through HR or other avenues, pay attention to the comments and suggestions you're getting as an organisation. If you have a habit of either not asking for input from your teams, or asking for it but ignoring it, that's a problem that's much more cultural and operational, and will be exacerbated by social media, not solved by it.

The truth: criticism is happening anyway, even if you aren't listening for it now. Empower the users of your system to provide constructive feedback in a professional manner and demonstrate that you're listening, and it becomes a constructive and progressive exercise. If the negative comments appear, learn how to deal with them in a positive fashion, and address them. Recognise that users want to be heard and acknowledged.

- **Technical Difficulties**

For any organization/universities to decide and build an internal social network on its own, there are significant challenges that needs to be addressed. A big challenge is having competent technical resources in-house and the overhead of managing these resources. An option of having a third-party consultant building and managing a one-off application would also invite risks associated to scalability and future support. A better option will be to look for a service that is based off the "Cloud" and management as well as upgrades of the app is perpetually done as part of the supplier's core business. Services like KOLUNI by UREKALABS are positioned to address these risks.

2.2 REWARDS

With an internal social network service like KOLUNI, members are able to enjoy the benefits of having their very own Social Networking Site. The benefits are:

- **Event Management**
With the inbuilt calendar and events management setup where users are allowed to create, participate as an audience or just view any events, any activities that pertain to the user as an individual will be listed in the manner of agendas.
- **Internal networking**
The real value delivered by an internal social networking is the group communications dynamic where a single user can communicate both actively and passively with other similar or 'connected' users or the entire campus population as a whole.

A study done by Towers Perrion found that 43% of employees do not feel they know enough about their own customers. (Intranet Insider, 2009) In that context, using an internal social networking system may form a better faculty-student relationship.

- **Promotes idea generation**
Knowledge is transferred from the more knowledgeable user to the less-knowledgeable ones. As the collective competencies increase, there would be more quality exchanges of ideation.
- **News and information**
Faster dissemination of news, announcements and press releases.
- **Knowledge sharing and collaboration**
The internal social network allows its users to connect with relevant or related individuals by subject matter or interest to help bridge information gap that's rampant with the traditional setup of many existing educational online systems.

As communicating on a project or within a team using a collaborative tool e.g. Facebook, Google Wave, is more engaging than the typical e-mail information exchange, KOLUNI as a tool can help capture tacit knowledge that would otherwise be locked inside of the users' heads, e-mails and conversations.

3. KOLUNI | Internal social network

UREKALABS understand the concerns that have arisen due to the popular adoption of public social network sites. KOLUNI (www.koluni.com) serves to address these concerns by providing a platform where users can contribute to the campus ecology in an intimate, private community.

One of the primary goals of the proposed internal social network is the retention of students' interests, by engaging them in the community, creating closer ties with the people around them, and informing them about campus events, clubs and other activities.

3.1 MAIN GOALS

KOLUNI is a centre for the creation of discussion amongst community members of the education institution, also a tool to manage a user's campus life:

- a. Complement existing online systems in the university/college by providing a structure that enhances collaboration and communication among university/college staff, lecturers and students.
- b. Produce an engine that supports existing students and campus activities in a familiar and bounded environment (e.g. Classifieds open to only other members of the university/college etc.)
- c. A personalised event management tool where users are able to ascertain all campus activities that are related to them.

3.2 SECONDARY GOAL: RESEARCH

Once the whole campus community has been engaging within the private KOLUNI, It will be able to act also as a repository of research carried out by the university and faculty members, as research could take place based on materials shared in the KOLUNI online system itself.

4. SCOPE OF KOLUNI

4.1 WHAT KOLUNI IS

- i. a repository of information and knowledge
- ii. a group effort to learn and collaborate
- iii. a network of communities to create and use these resources

4.2 WHAT KOLUNI IS NOT

- i. a replacement of existing on-site Learning Management System

4.3 DEFINING FEATURES

There are several defining features that set KOLUNI apart from the conventional educational online systems:

- **Activity Feeds**
Summarises group and connection activities
- **Calendar**
Lists down all events available in campus. Users are able to create new events, view, RSVP and participate in discussion related to the event.

4.4 PROJECT BENEFICIARIES

- **Students**
Students can get to socialise with their peers and subject matter experts. An insight can be gained on the problems and proper solutions can be sought.
- **Clubs and Societies**
Clubs and societies are able to reach out to a bigger audience in promoting their events. KOLUNI can serve as a full complement to their existing campaign promotion initiatives: posters pasted in campus, audio announcements, flyers etc.
- **Lecturers**
Empower lecturers to leverage on the widely adopted social media lifestyle which are already embraced by youths.

No longer limited by the amount of credit hours spent with the students, lecturers can make good use of KOLUNI as an enabler to a subject understanding.

Shy students who may feel uncomfortable approaching their lecturers in person can use social media as an easier way of communicating.

- **Campus Employees**
Social media tools place everyone within an organisation on an equal footing. They create a 'side by side' as opposed to a 'top down' communication environment. Status barriers are broken down and employees become more engaged with management and the organisation.
- **Alumni**
Members of the Alumni will still be connected to the alma mater by being part of the campus community. All parties be it lecturers, students and the alumni itself can benefit from being able to communicate sans-barrier in the same system.
- **Organisation as a whole**
The benefits of internal usage of a Social Network Community for a big organisation are very clear: It gives its members a space to informally discuss things, to obtain answers to their questions (i.e. to retrieve implicit knowledge) to connect to each other and to manage their identity.

5. KOLUNI IN THE FUTURE

Although KOLUNI has a strong suite of its base applications, UREKALABS are fully aware of the social networking technology that is always expanding and evolving. Therefore, upon member's requests and feedback, future development and features will be developed to ensure that the requirements will further elevate their Social Networking experience.

With time, KOLUNI will constantly evolve to serve the needs of its community. As users gain familiarity with the system, naturally they will start expressing their needs of the community. We at UREKALABS are eager to incorporate changes in future versions of KOLUNI based on feedbacks of its users.

These are the features that are in development for KOLUNI 2.0:

- Classifieds (refined)
- File attachment
- Forum
- Internship Job Listings
- Leaderboard
- Poll
- Private messaging
- RSS Feeds Extension

6. KOLUNI, YOURS TRULY

UREKALABS strive to have KOLUNI to be of great value to your organisation.

6.1 PERSONALISED

As a system, KOLUNI can be made personal by having it tailored to your needs. A system with your organisation logo, colour change, and any minor changes can be done.

6.2 DATA OWNERSHIP

We are familiar with the issues that you may confront as an organisation. We understand that both personal and corporate information is especially sensitive and that you may have concerns about sharing other personal information with us as well.

Be assured that all of your content on the KOLUNI system will be owned by your organisation. Should you choose to opt-out of the service, it is our pledge that all data pertaining to the system will be destroyed.

6.3 YOUR RULES

The KOLUNI user guidelines will be determined by your organisation. We understand that as an educational institution you have in place ready rules and regulations. The system will be fully monitored and controlled by you. Have your users utilise the system the way you want them to.

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