WCES 2012

Twitter usage habits of undergraduate students

Huseyin Bicen[a*], Nadire Cavus[b]

[a] Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies, Near East University, Nicosia, 98010, Northern Cyprus
[b] Department of Computer Information Systems, Near East University, Nicosia, 98010, Northern Cyprus

Abstract

Twitter has a potential to be used as a professional and social networking since individuals who have similar interests can meet on Twitter. Twitter is a multiplatform Web 2.0, part social networking - part microblogging tool, freely accessibly on the Web. The aim of this study was to investigate the usage habits of undergraduate students on Twitter. The study was conducted on ninety three volunteered undergraduate students. The data obtained by the survey was analyzed and commented upon using the SPSS program with the percentage, frequency, and mean statistical analysis techniques. As the results show, majority of the participants, spent most of their time on Twitter. Quotes, photos, videos, music, news, IT news and magazine news are the most commonly shared items on Twitter. However, educational materials were observed to be least frequently shared by the students. From this premise, we argue that investigating the most preferred usage habits of students on Twitter is an important and hot topic research. We believe that in future days more research will be focused on usage of Twitter in education due to its characteristics and student's interest in this social network. Therefore, this study could be considered as an important preliminary study in this field.

Keywords: Twitter, web 2.0, microblogging, social networking websites, multiplatform, usage habits, students

1. Introduction

Web 2.0 is new web technology which is recognized and widely used by all internet users (Uzunboylu, Bicen & Cavus, 2011; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Selwyn, 2007; Hussein, 2010). It is accepted that Web 2.0 users have an active role on the internet. Nowadays, the users from all over the world are able to communicate co-operatively share information and take attraction to their shares (Buzzi & Buzzi, 2011). Via Web2.0, users can share not only news but also photos, vidoes and many other personal moments (Hughes, 2009). These web sites motivate theirs users to create groups, support each other and increase their shares. In 2007, a new blogging concept arose, so called microblogging. According to McFedries (2007) and Holotescu & Grosseck (2011) microblogs can be considered as weblogs, however, they have a stronger social network structure.

Twitter (2009) is a multiplatform Web 2.0, part social networking - part microblogging tool, freely accessibly on the Web (Stevens, 2008). On the other hand, Jaiku, Tumblr, MySay, Hictu, and Edmodo are other popular Web 2.0 microblogging tools. However, Twitter is one of the most popular of these microblogging tools (Java et al., 2007; McFedries, 2007). Communication can be managed in form of short messages around 140 characters (Grosseck & Holotescu, 2008). Social network structure of Twitter allows its users to follow each other and communicate via short messages. Drapeau (2009) and Thompson (2007) stated that Twitter has a potential to be used as aprofessional

* Huseyin Bicen. Tel.: +90-392-2236464/110; fax: +90-392-6802023
E-mail address: hbicen@neu.edu.tr.

and social networking since individuals who have similar interests can meet on Twitter (Lucky, 2009). One of the most imporntant aspects is that the commincation occurs in real time. This is also stated by Parry (2008) and Young (2008) who suggest that the exchange of information is immediate between peers. Also, users can share information and ideas immediately via using Twitter on mobile devices (Griswold, 2007).

When Twitter's technical structure and characteristics are considered, it is clear that Twitter's use in education will be inevitable in future days. In the age of technology we are currently in, it is important to support education environment via new technologies. From this point of view, investigating Twitter usage of students is believed to be essential for future studies and in this study authors aim to shed light on this topic.

2. The aim of the research

Aim of the study was to investigate the Twitter usage habits of students and to discover which functions of Twitter are preferred by the participants. The study attempted to find out the following subjects:

1- Places that Twitter is used
2- Hours per day, the students use Twitter
3- The most preferred Twitter sharing habits of students

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The study was conducted on ninety three volunteered undergraduate students from the Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (CEIT) at Near East University in Cyprus. The sample was comprised of 75% male and 25% female students during the 2010-2011 Spring term.

3.2. Instruments

Data was collected by means of an online survey developed by the researchers. The survey consisted of two sections. In the first section demographic characteristics of students and also length of time spent in Twitter were analysed. The second section contained items related to Twitter sharing preferences of students. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.92.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data was collected using the developed scale. After the data obtained by the survey was analyzed using the SPSS program with the percentage, frequency, and mean statistical analysis techniques.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1. Places where Twitter is used

According to the Figure 1, 34% of students use the Twitter on their mobile phone, 30% at home, 20% at café/restaurants, 13% at University and 3% of them at Internet Cafés. When the results were examined, it was observed that majority of the participants use the Twitter via their mobile phones without any place and time restriction. Uzunboylu, Cavus and Ercag (2009) noticed that mobile phones are small, and portable. So that, students carry cell phones with them (Cavus & Ibrahim, 2009) and they used Twitter on their mobile phones. Many researchers stated that the personal use of mobile phones has increased in recent years (Chen et al., 2000; Ling & Vaage, 2000; Lundby, 2002; Roschelle & Pea, 2002). Results of this study were supported by Smith (2011) which states that 94% of people used Twitter on their mobile phones.
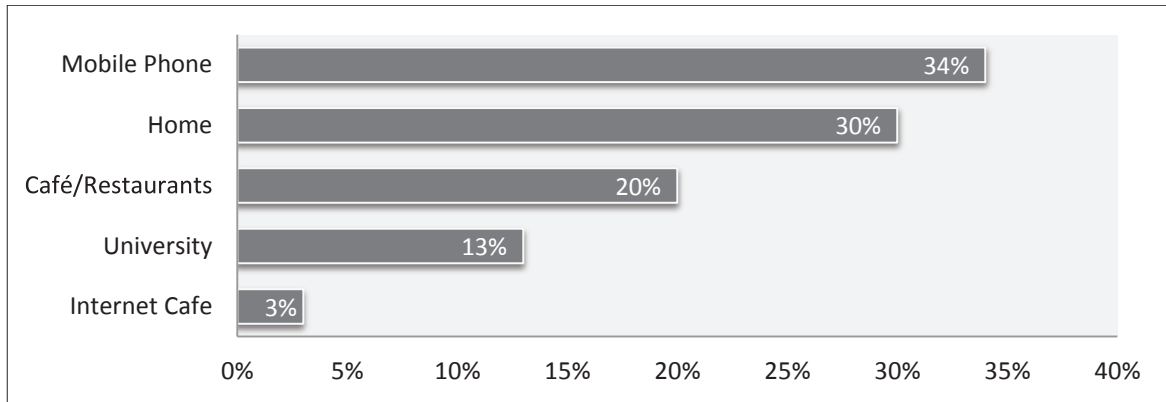
Figure 1. Distribution of Twitter used place

4.2. Twitter usage habits of students' hours/day

As indicated in Figure 2, 11% of the participants use Twitter one hour per day, 12% of them two hours per day, 30% of them three hours per day and 40% use the Twitter for more than four hours in a day. The results revealed that majority of the participants, 40%, spent most of their time on Twitter. Webster (2010) stated that the number of Twitter usage increased rapidly from 2008 to 2010 and this is indicated by an increase in usage from 5% to 87%.
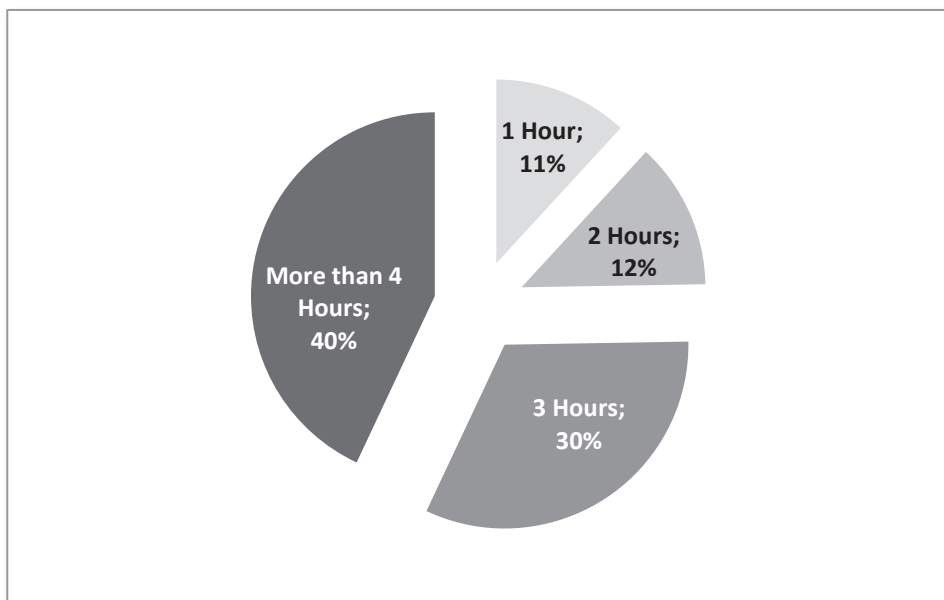

Figure 2. Distribution of Twitter usage habits of students hours/day

4.3 The most preferred usage habits of students on Twitter

As it can be seen from Table 1, quotes (M=4.24, SD=1.04), photos (M=4.23, SD=1.04), videos (M=4.17, SD=1.02), music (M=4.13, SD=1.01), news (M=4.10, SD=1.06), IT news (M=3.86, SD=1.12) and magazine news (M=3.72, SD=1.33) are the most commonly shared items on Twitter. However, educational materials (X=1.63, SD=0.65) were observed to be least frequently shared by the students. Therefore, Table 1 suggests that students use Twitter mainly for entertainment purposes. A study conducted in The University of New Hampshire (2010) also concluded that majority of the students use social networks for entertainment purposes. On the other hand Boaru et al. (2009) suggests that using Twitter has positive effects on language education.

Table 1. Distribution of the most preferred usage habits of students on Twitter

Items	Mean	SD
Quotes	4.24	1.04
Photos	4.23	1.04
Video	4.17	1.02
Music	4.13	1.01
News	4.10	1.06
IT News	3.86	1.12
Magazine News	3.72	1.33
Educational Materials	1.63	0.65

5. Conclusion

Social networking websites, such as Facebook, Myspace, and Twitter, have become an indispensable part of students' lives (Junco, 2010). Number of individuals using Twitter is increasing significantly each day. According to Nielson Online, the annual growth rate of new Twitter users increased 1382% in 2009 (Ostrow, 2009). Twitter allowes students to connect with each other and create uninterrupted communication (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009). Elavsky, Mislan and Elavsky (2011) pointed out that impact of Twitter on social interaction remains a fertile area for research. From this premise, we argue that investigating the most preferred usage habits of students on Twitter is an important and hot topic research. We believe that in future days more research will be focused on usage of Twitter in education due to its characteristics and student's interest in this social network. Therefore, this study could be considered as an important preliminary study in this field.

References

Borau, K., Ullrich, C., Feng, J., & Shen, R. (2009). Microblogging for language learning: using Twitter to train communicative and cultural competence. *In Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Advances in Web Based Learning* (*ICWL'2009).* 1(1), 78-87.

Buzzi, C., & Buzzi, M. (2011). Web 2.0: Twitter and the blind. *In Proceedings of the 9th ACM SIGCHI Italian Chapter International Conference on Computer-Human Interaction: Facing Complexity, 1*(1), 151-156.

Cavus, N., & Ibrahim, D. (2009). M-learning: an experiment in using SMS to support learning new English language words. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 40*(1), 78-91.

Chen, F., Myers, B., & Yaron, D. (2000). Using handheld devices for TESTs in classes. Retrieved April 13, 2009 from http://www.cs.cmu.edu/pebbles/papers/CMU-CS-00-152.pdf

Dunlap, J. C., & P. R. Lowenthal. (2009). Tweeting the night away: using Twitter to enhance social presence. *Journal of Information Systems Education, 20*(2), 129-35.

Elavsky, C. M., Mislan, C., & Elavsky, S. (2011).When talking less is more: exploring outcomes of *Twitter* usage in the large-lecture hall. *Learning, Media and Technology, 36*(3), 215-233.

Griswold, W. G. (2007). Five enablers for mobile 2.0. *Computer, 40*(10), 96-98.

Grosseck, G. & Holotescu, C. (2008). Can we use Twitter for educational activities? The 4th International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education, April 17-18, Bucharest.

Holotescu, C., Grosseck, G., (2011). M3-learning - Exploring mobile multimedia microblogging learning   . World Journal on Educational Technology.*3*(3). 168-176.

Hughes A. (2009) Higher education in a Web 2.0 world. (JISC Report). Retrieved December, 18, 2011 from http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/heweb20rptv1.pdf

Hussein, G., (2010). The Attitudes of Undergraduate Students Towards Motivation and Technology in a Foreign Language Classroom. International Journal of Learning and Teaching. 2(2).14-24.

Java, A., Song, X., Finin, T., & Tseng, B. (2007). Why we Twitter: understanding microblogging usage and communities. *In Proceedings of the Joint 9th WEBKDD and 1st SNA-KDD Workshop*. Retrieved February 2, 2008 from http://ebiquity.umbc.edu/get/a/publication/369.pdf

Junco, R. (2010). The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and success. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *27*(2), 119-132.

Lenhart, A., & Madden, M. (2007). Social networking websites and teens: an overview. (Pew Internet and American life project). Retrieved June 22, 2008 from http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/198/report_display.asp

Ling, R., & Vaage, O. F. (2000). Internet og mobiltelefon: Ikke lenger bare for de få. *Samfunnspeilet*, 6. Statistisk sentralbyrå.

Lucky, R. W. (2009). To Twitter or not to Twitter? *IEEE Spectrum*, *46*(1), 22-22.

Lundby, K. (2002). Knowmobile–Knowledge access in distributed training: mobile opportunities for medical students. *InterMedia*, 5, University of Oslo.

McFedries, P. (2007). Technically speaking: all a-Twitter. *IEEE Spectrum, 44(*10), 84.

Ostrow, A. (2009). Twitter growing at a staggering 1,382 percent. Retrieved November, 08, 2010 from http://mashable.com/2009/03/16/Twitter-growth-rate-versus-facebook

Parry, D. (2008). Twitter for academia. Retrieved January 1, 2009 from http://academhack. outsidethetext.com/home/2008/twitter-for-academia/

Roschelle, J., & Pea, R. (2002). A walk on the WILD side: how wireless handhelds may change CSCL. *In Proceedings of computer support for collaborative learning.* pp. 1-10, Germany: Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates, Hillsdale, NJ.

Selwyn, N. (2007). Screw blackboard. Do it on Facebook! An investigation of students' educational use of Facebook. Retrieved March, 03, 2008 from http://www.scribd.com/doc/513958/Facebookseminar-paper-Selwyn

Smith, A. (2011). 13% of online adults use Twitter. *Pew Internet and American Life Project.* Retrieved December, 03, 2011 from http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2011/Twitter%20Update%202011.pdf

Stevens, V. (2008). Trial by Twitter: the rise and slide of the year's most viral microblogging platform. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, 12(*1). 1-14. Retrieved October 1, 2008, from http://tesl-ej.org/ej45/int.html

Twitter (2009). Twitter. Retrieved January 02, 2009, from http://www.twitter.com/

University of New Hampshire (2010). Student grades not affected by social networking. Retrieved January 10, 2012 from http://www.newswise.com/articles/student-grades-not-affected-by-social-networkingnew-research-finds

Uzunboylu, H., Bicen, H., & Cavus, N. (2011). The efficient virtual learning environment: a case study of web 2.0 tools and Windows Live Spaces. *Computers & Education, 56*(3), 720-726.

Uzunboylu, H., Cavus, N., & Ercag, E. (2009). Using mobile learning to increase environmental awareness. *Computers & Education*, *52*(2), 381-389.

Webster T (2010) Twitter usage in America: 2010. *Edison Research.* Retrieved December, 03, 2011, from http://www.edisonresearch.com/twitter_usage_2010.php

Young, J. (2008). Forget e-mail: new messaging service has students and professors atwitter. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 54*(25), A15.