Internet Presence: A case for web 2.0 technology in the University of Cape Coast

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how the University of Cape Coast, Ghana can improve its web presence by utilising web 2.0 tools such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), micro blogging sites such as Twitter, social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr to create online communities. The Technology Acceptance Model is used in making the case for the adoption of web 2.0 tools. Increasing computer literate students, internet penetration and Facebook user rates are cited good indicators for adoption of web 2.0 tools. The possible use of web 2.0 tools such as VoIP, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr are examined. It is concluded that Web 2.0 technologies have come to stay and the members of the University who are Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants have come to live with them. The University of Cape Coast should take advantage of these tools to incorporate web 2.0 tools in the university communication system.

Keywords: Web 2.0, university, drawback, internet

Introduction

New technologies are emerging which have affected greatly on the way people interact online. Web 2.0 is the term given to describe a second generation of the World Wide Web that is focused on the ability for people to collaborate and share information online. Web 2.0 basically refers to the transition from static HTML Web pages to a more dynamic Web that is more organized and is based on serving Web applications to users [1]. Web 2.0 has introduced significant changes to the way the Internet is used as it puts the user in the centre enabling him to actively create, publish and share data [2]. People who use social networking sites will be more willing and able to work in a virtual environment [3]. The following are described by [4] as examples of important and common Web 2.0 technologies: Blogs, Wikis , Social bookmarking, Media sharing spaces, RSS feeds, Collaborative editing tools, Micro-blogging, Social networking sites. In addition, [4] discovered that Web 2.0 is being used both in the academic, administrative and support areas to enhance student learning in universities in Australia, the Netherlands, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. They also reports that Web 2.0 is being used in nearly all areas of higher education, including academic, administrative and support areas (p.9). These tools are being effectively used in other elsewhere such as University of Canterbury, Suffolk University, Loughborough University, Indiana University Bloomington and Elon University among others. [5] describes a social network as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others in the system (p. 210)

Drawbacks of uptake of web 2.0 tools in institutions include lack of support by top management as the adoption of web 2.0 tools requires some experimentation to get it right. There is sometimes the rejection by the users, that is, personnel and students. Also, there is the lack of a motivation

system in using web 2.0 tools. In addition, setting rules and guidelines for users is difficult as the tools could give rise to unauthorised usage by staff. Furthermore, maintaining web 2.0 tools demands commitment to continuous content generation and maintenance.

There were 167,335,676 Internet users in Africa as of June 30, 2012, with a 15.6% penetration rate and 51,612,460 Facebook subscribers on Dec 31/12, a 4.8% penetration rate. In Ghana, the report states 3,568,757 Internet users on June 30, 2012, 14.1% of the population, 1,630,420 Facebook subscribers for Dec 31/12 and a 6.4% penetration rate. The University of Cape Coast has 45Mb ADSL link to Vodafone Ghana and has wireless connectivity to members of the university and its environs. Mobile phones and smartphones can now access the internet [6]

Theory. I draw on the Technology Acceptance Model in making the case for web 2.0 tools in the University. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use a technology. The model suggests that when users are presented with a new technology, a number of factors influence their decision about how and when they will use it, notably, perceived usefulness and perceived ease-of-use [7]. The university community could be described to consist of more Digital Natives than Digital Immigrants. Digital Immigrants can appeal more to the Digital Natives if they speak the language of the Digital Natives.

Students of today can be classified as Digital Natives as they have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age [8] (p. 1). This presupposes that, to get the attention of these students one must use the tools and language that they understand. Those of us who were not born in the era of the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology are, and (will be) compared to them, Digital Immigrants (p. 1). The Educational Reforms of 2007 in Ghana introduced ICT into the curriculum of basic and secondary education thus students are being trained to be computer literate as they progress through basic and secondary education. They therefore by schooling have learnt how to access the internet and can derive benefits of web 2.0 tools.

Web 2.0 tools

As at December, 2012, one of the most commonly used social network sites is Facebook. Facebook, established in 2004, was initially designed (to support) for a college network at Harvard University. It expanded to include high school students in 2005, corporate networks in 2006, and eventually anybody who wished to join. According to Facebook press site [9], there are one billion monthly active users as of October 2012, 584 million daily active users on average in September 2012, with an average of 130 contacts or "friends" per user. Besides, 50% of users log in any day of the week and about 200 million users make access using mobile devices.

Mobile Telecommunications Network (MTN) Ghana, has launched a free service on Facebook dubbed 0.Facebook, which enables MTN customers to access Facebook for free [10]. The Airtel Ghana website also has information that Airtel Ghana has launched Facebook Zero, a product which enables Airtel Ghana subscribers to browse the world's largest social media site for free. The Facebook Zero product offers free access to text version only of Facebook (mobile) [11]. Airtel Ghana's Facebook Zero offers a faster mobile browsing experience. Airtel subscribers simply need to log on to 0.facebook.com to enjoy the service.

The University of Cape Coast (UCC) has an official page on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/UniversityOfChoice created on December 8, 2010. This is rather refreshing as it was evident from the UCC ICT policy that there was no formal social media policy. In the two years of existence of the Facebook page, it has 2,774 likes. However, other Facebook pages exist for the University of Cape Coast such as *http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Cape-Coast/141255319275444.*It   has   773   likes.   Another   is *http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-Of-Cape-Coast/91603262733* created on June 23, 2009, which   has   753   likes.   In   addition,   is   *http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Cape-Coast/105547812812179?fref=ts.* A small number of UCC-related Facebook sites exist. These

include:*http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Cape-Coast-Science-Education-2009/99395606634* (University of Cape Coast - Science Education 2009), *http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Cape-Coast-Nursing-Students-Association/205772969492286* (University of Cape Coast - Nursing Students Association), *http://www.facebook.com/pages/University-of-Cape-CoastSchool-of-business/150800278318646* (University of Cape Coast, School of Business). It is evident that the Facebook pages related to UCC are UCC-Alumni related. The University should strive to make its official Facebook page rich in content, serving the needs of members of the university and likes on the page will see an increment. A link should be provided on the University's homepage directing viewers to the UCC offical Facebook site. Students and other members of the university community can get updates of happenings on campus. Facebook is now considered the leading social network site used by students in higher education and is the most popular social network in New Zealand [12]

A trendy web 2.0 tool is VoIP. Skype is a popular VoIP software that enables a user to make free Video and voice calls to anyone else on Skype and has Instant messaging and file sharing. It has other paid services such as calls to mobiles and landlines worldwide at low rates, sending text messages for just a few pennies and group video calls with up to 10 people [13]. As UCC has the intranet infrastructure and a connection to the internet, it can deploy Skype on its network. Skype usernames of offices and departments can be published on the University's website and members of the public who are on Skype can communicate with the University. Such a setup will eliminate the need to run a private automatic branch exchange (PABX) on campus and reduce the university's phone bills.

Another social network site is YouTube. According to YouTube press site [14], it was founded in February 2005. YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small. University of Cape Coast can create videos about the university, introducing students' life, activities, congregation ceremonies among others. Links can then be provided on the university's website.

In addition, when there is a topical issue on campus the university can rely on Twitter to gauge the University community's reaction to it. Twitter, the microblogging web site that enables users to post unlimited messages of 140 characters or less, became the fastest-growing Internet communication tool earlier in 2012, according to Nielsen Online. It reached 1.2 million unique visitors in May 2008 and 18.2 million May, 2012, a more than fourteen-fold increase (http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/nielsen-news/twitter-grows-1444-over-last-year-time-on-site - up-175). According to the preference of each Twitter user, messages disseminate either to a select private group (the account's "followers") or to the searchable public Web.

A further usage of web 2.0 tools is Flickr, where pictures of activities on UCC campus can be uploaded. Students can be encouraged to upload their pictures of their activities on campus such as in the hall, lecture theatres, and bus shuttles among others. According to Flickr on it's About page, it is the best online photo management and sharing application in the world. It has as its main goals: helping people make their photos available to the people who matter to them and enabling new ways of organizing photos and video [15].

The University of Cape Coast has had an official presence on the World Wide Web with the URL *http://www.ucc.edu.gh* since 2005 although, web and email servers were set up in 1997. In line with the vision of UCC, a university of competitive choice in Ghana with worldwide acclaim, there must be a move to embrace the World Wide Web with all its associated advantages. This paper argues that the University can improve its web presence by utilising web 2.0 tools such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), micro blogging sites such as Twitter, social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Flickr to create online communities to enhance teaching, learning and other social communication. This is important because social media can be described as the Internet and other mobile-based tools and devices that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction

enabling the construction, co-construction and dissemination of words, images (static and moving) and audio. Web 2.0 tools can then be incorporated into a Learning Management System and serve as an introduction to online and blended learning. Embracing web 2.0 technologies will aid to avoid the prediction of [4] that, universities will lose their privileged role as primary producer of knowledge and gatekeeper to it as knowledge becomes more widely accessible through other sources and is produced by more people in more ways (p. 27). As the web 2.0 sites are not hosted in UCC there will not be a cost of infrastructure to the university. There may however, be a cost in personnel with regards to the maintenance of the sites. An official each from the Public Relations Directorate and the Computer of the University could be made in charge of updating the information on the web 2.0 sites when they are updated with information from the Public Relations Directorate.

Conclusion

The popularity of the Web 2.0 tools is beyond any doubt. Web 2.0 technologies have come to stay and the members of the University who are Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants have come to live with them. The University of Cape Coast should take advantage of these tools to incorporate web 2.0 tools in the university communication system. An icon for YouTube, Facebook, Flickr, Twitter on the UCC homepage and having Skype numbers for offices in the University especially the principal offices will be a good way to introduce web 2.0 tools to the University. Other forms of web 2.0 technologies, such as, web blogging, RSS feeds and Wikis can be used to disseminate information about the university. While Web 2.0 applications are known to have potential benefits within organizations, their adoption is still rather limited, especially in developing countries where the focus tend to be last mile internet connectivity. As web 2.0 tools increasingly become integrated into the daily lives of students, higher education institutions must consider if, when and how their potential can best be realised (Dabner, 2012). Change and innovation ought to be embraced although it may be initially challenging or stressful. People and organisations should shift from their comfort zones and stop relying on old ways of doing things.

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