Why Do University Students Prefer YouTube to Learn and Study?

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Abstract

YouTube has over 2 billion users who watch YouTube videos regularly. It is one of the social media platforms that increase its popularity in the last years with its use in educational purposes in various grade levels. The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that make university students use YouTube for learning and studying. Firstly, it looks into the reasons that make university students prefer YouTube for learning and studying. Secondly, it examines the factors that university students consider during content selection on YouTube. The qualitative research design methodology is used in the design of the study. Data is collected through the interviews that held on face to face. The study emerged that the reasons that motive university students to use YouTube in the learning process are individual learning needs, manageability, limitations of face to face education, and availability of conditions. Besides, the study showed that university students also consider some criteria while selecting content on YouTube. They mostly consider the appropriateness of content to their interest, popularity, thumbnail image, and reliability of sources. The results of the study can be helpful for content developers to understand the needs of university students in digital platforms. Furthermore, the results can give feedback to instructors on universities to understand the gaps in face-to-face education. Besides, the results also help to understand the mindset of university students during content selection in social media.

Keywords: YouTube, Content Selection, University Students, Studying and Learning

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Introduction

YouTube is one of the social media platforms that describe its mission to allow everyone to express themselves, make themselves heard, and know about the world we live in (YouTube, 2020). YouTube has over 2 billion users who watch YouTube videos regularly. Most of the users of YouTube are between 18-34 ages. According to statistics published by YouTube, people watch over one billion hours of video in a day via YouTube (YouTube, 2020).

YouTube is one of the social media platforms that increase its popularity in last years with its use in classrooms as an educational tool (Fleck, Beckman, Sterns & Hussey, 2014; Fleck, Richmond & Hussey,2013; Sherer & Shea, 2011). It is used for the instruction of different subjects like anatomy learning (Barry et al., 2016), mental health education (Lam & Woo, 2019), biology education (Dy, Aurand, & Friedman, 2019), clinical education (Rangarajan, Begg, & Somani, 2019), surgical education (Farag, Bolton, & Lawrentschuk, 2019; Rapp et al., 2016) and music education (Cayari, 2018).

YouTube not only used by university students its also used by children. A study conducted by Lien, Liew, Wong, Yee, & Yoon (2019) shows that 10-12 aged children use YouTube for information seeking, entertainment, and convenience of YouTube use. It means that YouTube is not only used for its funny and informative functions but also used for easiness and suitability for users even at young ages.

Besides, according to Duffy (2008), YouTube has the potential to create a learning community in which learners from all over the world come together and can create content, discover together and share their findings. These aspects of YouTube make it an informal learning space (Fisher & Ha, 2018). Therefore, it used widely by the persons who want to develop skills in particular areas or who want to learn activity for pleasure.

Social media platforms, including YouTube, become an alternative way to reach higher education. According to Gilroy (2010, p:22), social media has changed the way that "public interact with and perceives higher education." It means that higher education becomes more open to the public and more reachable for them with social media. In other words, social media gave a chance to reach the contents that are provided by the most prestigious universities in the world. Persons can reach the materials and videos presented by the faculty from the top-line universities like MIT via social media. When these are considered, YouTube becomes an attractive platform for learning and studying. Also, it plays a role in encouraging lifelong learning and meeting on-demand learning needs of persons.

To meet the learning needs of students, content developers should know the needs and the preferences of university students in social media platforms (Berk, 2009). This study attempted to investigate the factors that make university students use YouTube for learning and studying. Firstly, the study examines the factors that university students consider during content selection on YouTube.

Secondly, it looks into reasons that make university students prefer YouTube for learning and studying. The results of the study can be helpful for content developers to understand the needs of university students in digital platforms. Furthermore, the results can give feedback to instructors on universities to understand the gaps in face-to-face education. Besides, the results also help to understand the mindset of university students during content selection in social media

Method

Design of the Study

The qualitative research design methodology is used in the design of the study. The reason for selecting a qualitative design is to have a deeper understanding of the students' usage of YouTube as a source for learning and to understand the factors that make charming YouTube for them. We think that the qualitative study is the best way to understand the meaning of YouTube for university students (Maxwell, 2008).

The participants of the study are 16 university students who use YouTube actively to learn and study. Purposeful sampling is used in the selection of participants who uses YouTube regularly to learn and study.

Table 1. Personal Information About the Participants

		f (n=16)
Gender	Female	9
	Male	7
Grade Level	Prep. School	2
	Freshman	8
	Sophomores	2
	Juniors	2
	Seniors	2
Device	Smart Phone	11
	Desktop Computer	8
	Tablet PC	3

The personal information of the participants is given in Table 1. Participants have constituted nine female and seven male students. The vast majority of participants are freshmen (n=8), and there are two students from preparation school, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. The average age of the participants is 20. The ages are changed between 18 and 24. Most of the participants use a smartphone (n=11) during studying on YouTube. The majority of the participants are from the Faculty of Education (n=7), and it is followed by the faculty of Arts and Science (n=5) and the Faculty of Engineering (n=4).

Data Collection

Data is collected through the interviews that held on face to face. Each of the interviews has lasted an average of 10 minutes. A semi-structured interview form is used during the interviews. The interview form includes demographic questions and the questions that investigate the university students' YouTube usage behavior like how they select the video on YouTube, what factors they consider while choosing videos and why they apply to YouTube to learn and study.

Data Analysis

For analysis of the data, the procedures of qualitative data analysis that are proposed by Creswell (2009) are used. Firstly, data were transcribed and then read carefully. After that coding part was started. Maxwell (2008) defines the coding as the emerging of a set of categories from the raw data. For the categorization, the raw data is divided into small meaningful segments, and then the segments are named. These named segments constituted the codes. After that, the codes are read again and similar codes are collected together. The groups that constitute similar codes emerged the themes presented in the results section.

To ensure the reliability of the study, coding was made by two researchers. Some of the coding were made separately and then emerging codes were compared in a meeting. Remaining codes emerged in regular meetings with the participation of the two researchers. Furthermore, to calculate the agreement ratio between the two coders, the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used, and 82 % agreement was found between the coders.

Results

This study investigates the factors that orientate students learn from YouTube and the criteria they consider during content selection. We interviewed with the university students to explore these issues. The results of the interviews are presented in this section.

Reasons to Use YouTube in the Learning Process

The reasons that orientate university students to YouTube for studying and learning will be presented in this section. Table 2 shows the reasons that make university students use YouTube for studying and learning.

Table 2. The Reasons to Use YouTube for Learning and Studying

Theme	Code	f
Individual Learning Needs	Preparing for Exams	12
	Learning new subjects	12
	Recall of prior knowledge	8
	Absenteeism in Lecture	3
	Different instructional approach	2

	Doing homework	2
	Eliminating the misconceptions	1
	Reconstruction of knowledge	1
Manageability	Pausing/playing	6
	Skipping	3
	Adjustment of Pace	2
	Adding Subtitles	2
	Replaying	1
Limitations of Face-to-Face Education	Not being able to understand in lectures	8
	Lack of additional sources	3
	Not being able to meet individual learning needs	2
	Solving a limited number of questions in lectures	1
Availability of Conditions	Accessibility	12
	Diversity of choices	10
	Takes less time	9
	Flexibility in studying hours	2
	Networking with persons who are expert in the field	2

The reasons that orientate university students to YouTube for studying and learning are collected under four themes; individual learning needs, manageability, limitations of face-to-face education, and availability of conditions.

Individual Learning Needs

The first theme under the reasons to apply YouTube is individual learning needs. The results of the study showed that students are frequently using YouTube for preparing for exams (n=12). The research emerged that university students need a source that can summarize the subjects coherently and quickly, especially before the exams. Therefore, YouTube became an area that university students can find what they need before the exams. Participant 16 stated that "I apply for YouTube mostly during the midterms and final exam period." Exam preparation is one of the reasons that orientate students on YouTube.

They also indicated that the second reason for them to use YouTube for learning is to learn new subjects (n=12). University students reported that YouTube provides much further information about different topics. They also expressed that they can find information about a variety of subjects which are typically not related to their major, but they have an interest in it. Participant 9 expressed that s\he uses YouTube to learn about the topics that s\he interested in.

The other reason that university students use YouTube is the recall of prior knowledge (n=8). University students indicated that sometimes they need recalling previous knowledge that is learned

before current education. In such situations, they prefer using YouTube instead of looking at earlier notes or books. Participant 15 explained the case as the following;

Instructors assume that we know something, but I need to recall the previous topics. I will either look at high school notebooks or look at the videos for that. The videos are good for me as they give essential issues.

One of the reasons that make students use YouTube for learning is absenteeism in lectures (n=3). University students indicated that they could not attend all of the lectures due to several reasons, and in such times, they have a need to learn the topic from a source other than a book. In such a situation YouTube became a rescuer for them that enables them to learn the lesson from an expert like a professor in a famous university. Participant 11 indicated that "Something happened that day; you didn't go to class. Where else can you learn? If you tell your friend, he won't have time. After all, the person in the video is a faculty member and expert."

The other reason is the search for a different instructional approach (n=2). The participants of the study indicated that sometimes they have a need to learn the lesson from different lecturers, to see different viewpoints about the subject, and to learn different solutions about the problems they search for. In such times, YouTube allows them to reach a variety of experts and lectures about the issue they search for. Participant 15 expressed that "It is good to listen to the lesson from different teachers."

It is also found that one of the reasons to use YouTube in the learning process is doing homework (n=2). University students expressed that they are using YouTube as a source when they are doing homework. University students also think that YouTube can be a good source for eliminating misconceptions (n=1) and reconstruction of knowledge (n=1). They expressed that since they can see different viewpoints on YouTube, they can realize and fix the misconceptions, and they can reconstruct the knowledge in their mind.

Manageability

The second theme under the reasons to use YouTube in the learning process is manageability. This study revealed that students' ability to manage their learning processes on YouTube was one of the reasons that encouraged them to use YouTube in their learning process. The participants of the study indicated that, the chance to pause and play (n=6) when they need, the opportunity to skip (n=3) the parts they know or understand, the chance to adjust the pace (n=2) of the content, the opportunity to add subtitles (n=2) and the chance to replay the content (n=1), encourage university students to use YouTube in their learning process. Participant 11 says that

You can adjust the speed. For example, I usually watch at 1.25 speed; it gets shorter. You can pass where you want. You can take the video wherever you want. You control the time yourself. When you think it became more efficient.

As can be understood from the quotation, the manageability on YouTube becomes an incentive for university students to study and to learn from YouTube.

Limitations of Face-to-Face Education

The third theme under the reasons that make university students use YouTube is the limitations of face-to-face education. University students indicated that they apply YouTube when they do not understand in face to face lectures (n=8). Participant 4 stated that "I get support from YouTube when I have a problem on a subject or when I don't understand the subject."

The other reason that is stated by university students is the lack of additional sources (n=3). They expressed that they can find a vast number of sources, examples, and summary information on YouTube, and therefore, they prefer to use YouTube in their learning process. Participant 10 indicated that "Books are a bit heavy and difficult to find, of course, there are libraries, but sometimes we don't have time to go to libraries."

The other reason that emerged through the study is the inability to meet individual learning needs (n=3) and solving a limited number of sample questions in face-to-face lectures (n=3). Students reported that they apply YouTube to see more examples on the topic.

Availability of Conditions

The last theme under the reasons to apply YouTube is the availability of conditions. The first reason under the availability of conditions is accessibility (n=12). The study emerged that students use YouTube in their learning process due to they can reach it easily from anywhere and at any time. Participant 9 indicated that "It is easy to reach, I can reach it with my phone directly," and Participant 13 said that "I have easy and free access to open courses and expert content from best universities in the world."

The other reason that makes YouTube attractive for university students is the diversity of choices (n=10). Students indicated that since they can find several different contents in many different subjects, YouTube became an attractive learning tool for them.

One of the reasons that affect the use of YouTube in the learning process is it takes less time (n=9). Students indicated that since they can find the exact subject that they look for and there is the essence of what they need, it takes less time to study a subject from YouTube. Participant 15 stated that "We see more solutions in a short time… Thick book is intimidating, I save time there and learn in a short time."

Lastly, it has emerged that students use YouTube in their learning process due to flexibility in studying hours (n=2) and networking with persons who are experts in the field (n=2). University students indicated that chance to reach content whenever they want, and the opportunity to network with experts are good reasons for them to use YouTube for learning.

Content Selection Factors in YouTube

The factors university students have taken into consideration while selecting the content on YouTube were also investigated in the study. Table 3 shows the factors that university students consider while selecting digital content.

Table 3. *Content Selection Factors*

Theme	Code	*f*
Preference Factors	Appropriateness to interest	10
	Popularity	8
	Interesting topic	7
	Thumbnail image	6
	Reliability of sources	6
	Up-to-dateness	1
	Comments	1
	The language of the content	1

Results showed that university students often paid attention to the appropriateness of the content to their interest (n=10). They indicated that if the content seems appropriate to their interest, they choose the content for studying. Participant 3 stated that "I choose the videos that are appropriate in my interest."

The second issue that they pay attention to while selecting digital content is popularity (n=8) of the content. The study revealed that there was a perception in university students that if the number of views is high, the content is high quality. Participant 11 indicated that "ıf the number of views is high; this video is a good one."

The third issue that university students consider in selecting content is interesting topic (n=7). Students indicated that if they find the topic interesting, they choose the content. Participant 8 stated that "I watch the videos that are interesting."

The fourth issue that makes students select content is the thumbnail image (n=6). The study revealed that the thumbnail image is seen as a summary and representative of the content. Students expressed that if the thumbnail image is attractive, they open the content.

The other issue that university students pay attention to is the reliability of sources (n=6). University students indicated that they investigate the person who prepared the content and the sources used in the preparation of the content. Participant 1 noted that "I search about the person who prepared the video; I search for graduated university, department, and previous studies." Besides, participant 9 said that "I try to find the content that I believe in its reliability."

The other issues that university students pay attention to while selecting content are up-to-datedness (n=1) and comments (n=1). University students indicated that they have a quick look at the comment about the content before choosing the content.

The last issue is the language of the content (n=1). University students indicated that language is also crucial for university students. They are selecting the videos that are prepared in a language they can understand.

In conclusion, this study investigated the use of YouTube by university students as a learning tool. Results show that as well as university students use YouTube for relaxation and fun, they also use it for learning. The study emerged that the reasons that motive university students to use YouTube in the learning process are individual learning needs, manageability, limitations of face to face education, and availability of conditions. Besides, the study showed that university students also consider some criteria while selecting content on YouTube. They mostly consider the appropriateness of content to their interest.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, the opinions of university students about the reasons why they chose YouTube for learning and studying were investigated. YouTube is the most popular video platform for university students for both entertainment and education. Literature shows that there are studies about YouTube that focus on the educational aspect of YouTube (Burton, 2008; Clifton & Mann, 2011; Jones & Cuthrell, 2011; Murugiah, Vallakati, Rajput, Sood, & Challa, 2011). Studies show that YouTube can be used as an effective and innovative medium of instruction (Jaffar, 2012; Krauskopf, Zahn, & Hesse, 2012).

In this study, we investigated the factors that university students have taken into consideration while selecting the content on YouTube. University students mostly prefer the contents that are interesting for them or popular in social media. Furthermore, thumbnail image, reliability of sources, up-to-dateness, comments, and language of the content also has a vital role in the content selection of students on YouTube. Shoufan (2019) also found that interestingness and language is one of the factors that make university students like the content on YouTube. Researches on the literature show that when people are interested in something, they become more likely to pay attention to it, orient toward it, and eventually learn about it (Bergin, 1999; Hidi, 2001). The results of the study done by Bonk, Lee, Kou, Xu, & Sheu (2015) show that curiosity, desire to learn, information seeking, and need to self-improvement are effective in the usage of the web for learning. As proved with studies in the literature and showed in our study, the interest is one of the encouraging factors that make students use web environments, including YouTube for learning.

YouTube is a space for informal learning. Informal learning environments are not only learning environments but also has an entertainment dimension. Therefore, the quality, reliability, and

suitability of the content could vary in informal learning environments, including YouTube (Kocyigit, Nacitarhan, Koca & Berk, 2019; Tan, 2013). Hence, it is natural that participants stated that they consider the "reliability of sources" while selecting learning content on YouTube.

The reasons for university students' use of YouTube for learning and studying are collected under four themes. These can be listed as individual learning needs, manageability, limitations of face to face education, and availability of conditions.

There are studies in the literature that shows the first multimedia environment that students apply for their individual learning needs is YouTube (Mercer 2011). People can create a digital and social community of learning with others who have a similar interest or expertise via YouTube; therefore, it became a popular area for informal learning (Lee & Lehto, 2013). As supported by other research in the literature, YouTube is seen as an essential platform for persons to meet their individual learning needs. This study also shows that students generally use YouTube videos to meet their individual learning needs, such as preparing for the exams, learning new subjects, recall of prior knowledge, and the learn the subjects of the course that they did not attend. Richards-Babb, Curtis, Smith, & Xu (2014) also found in their study that students watched problem-solving videos for exam preparation. It means that YouTube is used for the persons both to meet the informal learning needs and meet deficiencies of formal learning needs.

The other reason for the use of YouTube videos for learning is manageability. The chance of pause and replay, skip, pace adjustment, and adding subtitles encourages students to use YouTube videos in their learning process. In a study done by Ranga (2017), YouTube videos are used instead of face-to-face sessions. Results show that pause and re-watch when they needed gave the students the chance to learn at their own pace. It means that, while learning from videos, students wanted to pause, skip, and adjust video according to their study plan; in brief, they want to manage the video.

The other reason that students orient in YouTube videos for learning is to meet needs that are not met in a face-to-face learning environment. Results indicated that students go to YouTube videos when they cannot understand in lectures and cannot find additional sources. Raikos and Waidyasekara (2013) found that students follow the videos when they are easy to interpret during their learning process. In addition, Chtouki, Harroud, Khalidi, & Bennani (2012) proposed that students easily comprehend and recall the complex concepts when they are studied with videos which have visual explanations. It can be interpreted that the facilities of YouTube, like having easily understandable videos, including visual representations, also make university students use YouTube for learning.

The other result of the study is university students use YouTube due to its availability. Students indicated that there are subjects that are not learned during face-to-face education, and YouTube is easy to access and has available conditions for learning. Jaggars (2014), in her study about the comparison of online and face-to-face courses, showed that online classes are found more

efficient in terms of it is flexibility, convenience and time efficiency by some of the college students. Also, Ranga (2017) proposed that YouTube gives students a chance to reach videos 7/24 without any time and place restrictions. Therefore, the accessibility of YouTube makes it a preferable learning area for university students. The other charming point about YouTube is the diversity of choices. Similar to the results of our study, Bonk, Lee, Kou, Xu, & Sheu (2015) found that an abundance of resources, having alternatives, having control over resources, and learning new subjects are essential for users to choose YouTube for studying and learning. In short, the factors such as accessibility, diversity of choices, and easiness to use of YouTube makes it available and preferable for university students.

University students are the members of the digital generation, they are always connected to the digital world, and they also expect to always-on learning environments. Karakas and Manisaligil (2012) have some advice to nurture the members of the digital generation; to give open access to educational resources, to give time and opportunity to learn at their own pace and according to their interests. Results show that YouTube has the potential to respond to these needs of the digital generation. In this platform, members of the digital generation have an opportunity to learn with the multimedia environment, share their ideas with people around the world, interact with the people who have similar interests. With this aspect, YouTube becomes a chance to overcome the gaps related to time and sources; furthermore, it brings flexibility and choice to learning environments.

It can be inferred from the results of this study that YouTube is preferred in the digital age we are in and will be preferred in the future for entertainment and reorienting self-directed learning. For university students, meeting individual learning needs and having control of the learning environment are essential reasons to prefer YouTube for learning and studying.

It is advised to instructional designers, researchers, and content developers, who develop multimedia content for YouTube and similar social media platforms, that they should consider university students' individual learning needs and their desire to have control over the learning environment. In short, designers and developers should consider the voices of university students while creating new content for digital platforms.

Directions for Future Research

We conducted qualitative research to understand the reasons for the university students to use YouTube to learn and study and the criteria they consider in the content selection process. One to one interview transcripts were the data sources of this study. In future researches, the analytics about the participants' online transactions on YouTube could be used as an additional source to triangulate the findings of the study.

Secondly, we investigated the reasons for university students to use YouTube for studying and learning based on qualitative data. Based on qualitative data analysis, some themes and codes were derived. These results can be used for the scale development of the online learning needs of university students. In this way, the results found in this study could be supported by the quantitative research findings.

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