IMPACT OF WEB TECHNOLOGIES ON STUDENT-LECTURER REFERENT POWER RELATIONSHIP

Saeed Alshahrani[1], Dr Rupert Ward[2], Dr Martyn Walker[3]

University of Huddersfield (United Kingdom) [1]
University of Huddersfield (United Kingdom) [2]
University of Huddersfield (United Kingdom) [3]

Saeed.a.alshahrani@gmail.com[1], rupert.ward@hud.ac.uk[2]

Abstract

Referent power is "based on B's desire to be identified or associated with A" (Dunne et al., 2010). In the history of the development of higher education, the relationship between the lecturer and the students has changed because of many different factors. Before the internet and web revolution, the lecturer used to be the main information source for his/her students. The web, as a modern source of knowledge, is now used universally and the spread of its usage might affect the relationship between the lecturer and his/her students. Understanding the impact of this change appears to be important as it would be employed in improving teaching techniques. In this area, many studies have focused on the impact of using the internet and web applications on students and lecturers. These studies have widely investigated the impact of the internet on student's achievements, attitude and also have shown how the role and performance of the faculty have changed. This paper aims to investigate the impact of using web resources as a source of knowledge on the student-lecturer referent relationship from students' perspectives. The investigation focuses on how students' knowledge gained from using websites has impacted on the relationship with their lecturer as a reference person which theoretically means referent power. 1661 students from 30 universities/ educational institutions participated in this research.

Keywords: Power, referent power, TPUS, PASW and thematic analysis

Brief literature review

Most of studies that examine the impact of online resources on higher education systems are either broad or multi-purpose(Simsim, 2011, Al-Salem, 2005). My research is however, more precise. This research is one of a few studies that focus on specific aspects of the impact of internet websites. Although previous studies have contributed to creating background research for this study, none of these studies have focused on the websites impact on student-lecturer relationship. This paper focuses on student-lecturer relationship, and specifically on the referent aspect of the relationship while other researchers have shown the impact of the web on both lecturers and students(Alturki and Alfadda, 2007, Sait et al., 2008, Al-Ghaith et al., 2010, BritishCouncil, 2011, Altraounah, 2012).

Referent power is based on an individual's personal charisma. People hold someone with referent power in very high regard and will do what that person says , based on their regard for the person(Schwalbe, 2010). Referent power is also viewed as the influence that people exercise because other people believe in them (Walker, 2011). Students normally follow the lecturer's instructions because they admire him/her. They identify with the lecturer and have positive regard for him/her; they willingly do as the lecturer says. This is the nature of the referent relationship that should exist between the student and the lecturer. When students follow the instructions of the lecturer, it means that the students believe and share the same perspective as the lecturer. Several studies have proven that this type of relationship is possibly affected by factors such as cultural differences, the lecturer's personal charisma, and the level of knowledge of lecturer as well as their age and gender(Tauber, 2007, Guilfoyle, 2007, Alshahrani, 2013).

Methodology

This research investigates students' feelings towards their referent relationship with their lecturer in classroom. Does the lecturer still have referent power; as students can find online academic materials and expert people who can provide them with advice?

A Simi-structure questionnaire was designed by using six items from Teacher Power Use Scale (TPUS) instrument to measure how students' information gained from accessing websites has impacted on the relationship with their lecturer in terms of considering them as a role model. At the end of the instrument items an open-ended question was added so that participants were allowed more freedom in terms of providing more information, such as their feelings, views and awareness.

The questionnaire was distributed to a wide range of students in higher education to gather data about their experience of using web technology in their education. In total, 1361 participations have been accepted as valid. Out of these, 969 were males, 377 were females and 15 did not mention their gender. A further 300 participations have been omitted due to incompletion.

Analysis

Data collected by using TPUS instrument was analysed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) which was recently renamed PASW (Predictive Analytics Software). PASW is a powerful statistical software package that is widely used in social studies(Coakes and Steed, 2009).For the open-ended question, thematic analysis was used because it is the most suitable approach for this research due to its flexibility and its short answers(Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2008, Bryman, 2012). Themes that have been extracted from the analysis of the open-ended question represent the reasons that led to the impact of a student lecturer referent relationship as a result of the use of the Internet.
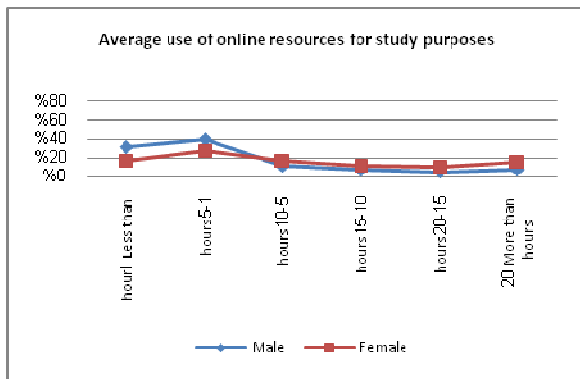
Results

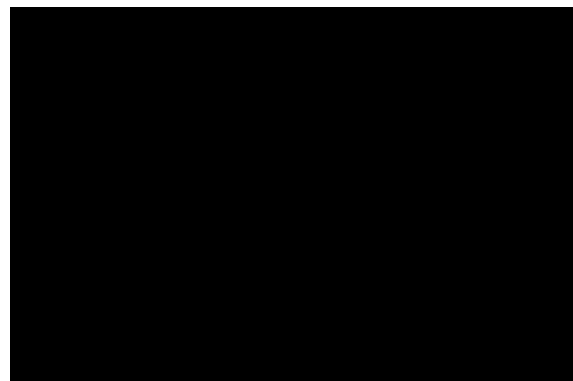Figure 1: Average use of online resources per month

Figure 2: The percentage of internet websites impact on student-lecturer referent power relationship

Figure 3: The level of internet websites impact on student-lecturer referent power relationship

Initial results show that the use of web pages for the purpose of study is very low among students of both genders as shown in figure (1). More than 60% of students use websites only for 1-5 hours and less per month. However, this low amount of the use has noticeable impacted on their association with their lecturers as shown in figure (3) where

3.5 in x axis represents minimum impact while 7 represents maximum impact. The level of the impact between males and females is convergent. Results show that the websites resources have impacted on the referent power relationship of 80.92% of the students as shown in figure (2). This means that those students have become less influenced by the lecturer. They refer the reasons of the impact to several factors. The results show that the easy access to available information on the internet websites and the limit of some lecturers' knowledge are the main reasons that impact on the referent relationship. Also to avoid some lecturers' poor personal behaviour, 38% of the students claim that the internet websites encourage them to find experts and professionals on the internet who can provide them with some of the duties and responsibilities that are traditionally the role of the lecturers.

On the other hand, the results also found that the internet websites have no impact on student lecturer referent power relationship on 19.08% of the students. 43% of them consider the lecturer's information as more accurate than websites information and the experience that he/she provides is more convincing. 18% of the students whom the websites did not impact on their referent relationship with lecturer explain the reason to be the power and the influence of lecturer's power position in classroom. 8% of the students believe that the age of the lecturer gives him/her a broader view that impacts on his/her ability to evaluate the information available on the Internet websites much better than the students. 6% of the students had concerns about the internet websites contents as they might have been provided by persons who do not share with them the same religion or culture.

Conclusion

The internet websites have impacted on most of students' lecturer referent power relationship due to their access to the internet websitesbut at a small level and high amont. This is mainly because the Internet websites have become a rich source of information. This is more evident because earlier, the lecturer had been the only or the main source knowledge to the students. Because providing knowledge is a part of the lecturer's duties, some students are still in close relationship with their lecturers as they believe that lecturers provide them with other support and guides that they believe they cannot get from online resources.

Brief biography

Dr Rupert ward, "Having studied for a MPhys (Hons) Physics with Theoretical Physics at the University of Manchester (graduating 1997), I studied for both a PhD in Atomic Physics at the University of Manchester (graduating 2001) and a PGCE in Further, Adult and Higher Education at Manchester Metropolitan University (graduating 2000), before completing a Masters in Business Administration (2010). I am currently completing an MSc in Technology Management focusing on aspects of higher education development in Africa. I am a Chartered Physicist of the Institute of Physics, as well as a Fellow of the British Computer Society, a Chartered IT Professional and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy". Mr SaeedAlshahrani has completed a diploma in computer science between 1993 and 1997. He worked in computing and information technology sector from 1997 to 2008. During this period he finished his undergraduate degree in information technology and computing at Open University in London by distance learning (graduating 2007) and worked as a part-time teacher in Saudi Arabia. In 2010 he completed aMSc in Information System Management at University of Huddersfield. Currently heis a third year PhD candidate at the University of Huddersfield. His research is about how technology has impacted on student-lecturer relationship. Hehas published several papers discuss student lecturer relationship.

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