Urban Farmers via Social Media Group: The Role of Internet - based Information Services in meeting the Urban Agricultural Information Needs

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Abstract:

Social media has become a vital part of social life. It affects the beliefs, values, and attitudes of people, as well as their intentions and behaviours. Meanwhile, the emerging trends in Internet - based Information Services via social media enables governments and organizations to engage people while allowing consumers to make informed decisions. In supporting the Malaysian agriculture information needs and demands, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Library were looking forward to provide the best practices in Information Services via Internet based and social media on Urban Agriculture, which is in line with the university goals "Strengthening UPM as a Centre of Excellence in Agriculture" besides the WLIC 2018 theme "Transform Libraries, Transform Societies". The purpose of this case study is to describe the initiatives taken by several netizen which have same interest in Urban Agriculture by developing a Social Media Group for the sake of local communities in Malaysia. In particular, the significant role of analysing social media is to advance the understanding of information sharing, communication, opinion formation, and dissemination could be recognized. The social media group were named "Kebun Bandar: Jom Tanam Sendiri" (Urban Farm: Let's Plant) which encourages resource-sharing, through the social media locally and globally, in the urban agricultural context. This case study on specific social media group will find the information needs of urban farmers and provide guides in Web based information services for UPM Library in meeting the information needs of urban farmers. It is an initiative to study the social media content in providing the best practice for Internet based - Information Services to the library user also the local communities. The data for this study were collected through content analysis, observations and documents shared in this specific social media group. Findings of the studies consists of the general contents of the social media group "Kebun Bandar: Jom Tanam Sendiri" such as the focus and objectives of the group. Patterns on information sharing, communication, opinion formation, and dissemination via the social media group were also analysed and discussed. Using the information obtained from social media, researchers can gain valuable insights into the beliefs, values, attitudes, and perceptions of social media users with regard to the utility of user-generated content and trust formation. This paper may be used as an initiative of information service management and also as a

useful research tool that may help and assist other information providers from other countries in facilitating their diverse communities

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Introduction

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) is an institution that has become a glorious legacy to the history of agricultural education in Malaysia. UPM's agriculture through education and research, providing quality human capital, enriching knowledge exploring various innovations and creating an excellent life. In 2015, UPM assisted the community by introducing 19 Urban Agriculture programmes in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Johor, Perak and Pahang (Malaysia states). UPM has taken the initiative to introduce Urban Agriculture as an initiative to enhance the availability and accessibility of food among urban dwellers which is expected to increase in numbers rapidly due to the migration of rural dwellers to urban areas. This will also lessen the dependence on food from rural areas which will in turn reduce carbon footprint and increase the nation's food self-sufficiency.

In supporting the Malaysian agriculture information needs and demands, UPM Library were looking forward to provide the best practices in Information Services via Internet based and social media. UPM library were named as Perpustakaan Sultan Abdul Samad (PSAS) after the name of the 4th constitutional ruler of Selangor. To accomplish its mission in providing excellent resources, services and facilities to support learning, teaching, research and consultancy activities of UPM, the Library has over the years built up its collection in various subject fields, both in print and electronic format. The Library currently holds a collection of 670,000 volumes of books and bound journals, as well as a collection of maps, sound recordings, microforms, video tapes and slides.

Besides online databases and e-theses, PSAS also provide Agriculture Information Sources as one of their e-resources for the user. Which are consists of FAO AGRIS Database, Malaysian AGRIS Database and MyAGRIC Portal. The FAO AGRIS Database initiative was set up by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in the 70s and created a worldwide cooperation for sharing access to agricultural science and technology information. Based on available technologies, AGRIS was initially collecting bibliographic references for a central database. Beginning in April 1979, Perpustakaan Sultan Abdul Samad, UPM has been appointed as the National Center of AGRIS (International Information System for the Agricultural Science and Technology) and responsible for collecting and documenting material in the field of agricultural science and technology in Malaysia and becomes a data provider to the FAO AGRIS database. Malaysian AGRIS database contains bibliographic records of agricultural science and technology, including forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, food science and environmental science; covering the geography, history, education, information development, economics, sociology, engineering and other related fields. Materials indexed in the database consist of journal articles, books, book chapters, monographs and conference papers published in Malaysia. It can be reached by this link http://www.agris.upm.edu.my:8080/dspace/

While MyAGRIC Portal contains information on Malaysian agricultural science and technology, including forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, food science, environmental science and natural resources. The portal is a concept for a web sites and union catalogues

that serve gateway to Malaysian agriculture information. This bibliographic database dealing with all aspects of agricultural science and technology and it covers publications written in Malay or English languages published in Malaysia. MyAgric also provide a number of links, such as Official portal and Publications (based on educations, government agencies, private companies, societies and associations and also organizations).

As one of academic library in Malaysia, PSAS do have several channel or platform to promote and disseminate their information and services to others by using social media. In additional, altmetrics which is a social media metrics have been one of indicator to measure the academic visibility nowadays (Priem, Piwowar & Hemminger, 2012). Social medias been applied by PSAS were Facebook, Tweeter, Instagram and Youtube. These social media especially Facebook were consider as relevant tools for communications and information sharing which is related to the content marketing of scholars.
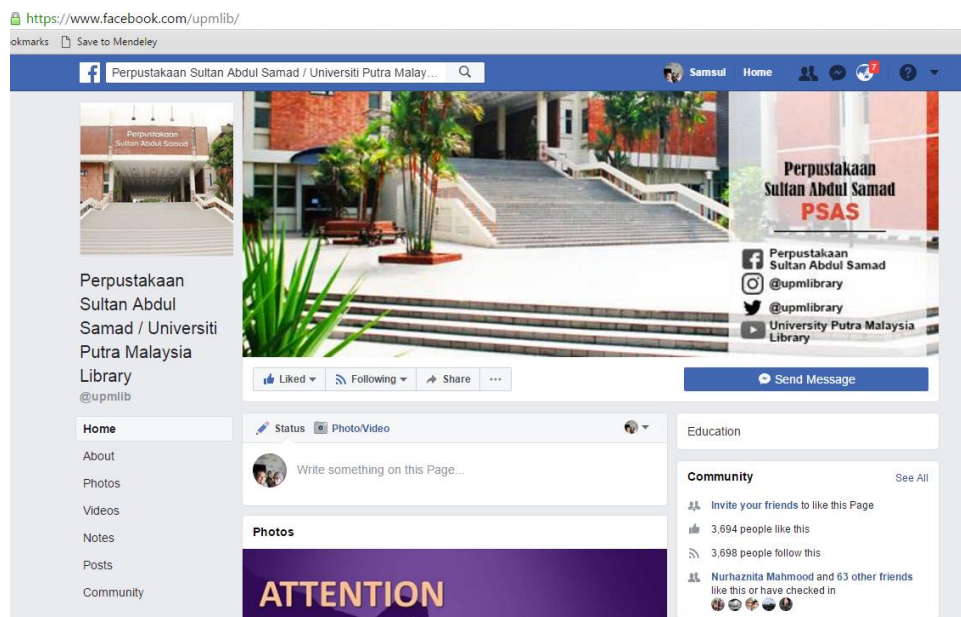
UPM Library Facebook Page

It is an initiative to study the social media content in providing the best practice for Internet based - Information Services to the library user also the local communities. The information and collection development of UPM Library were based on their niche area Agricultural. This paper reflects the Agricultural Libraries Special Interest Group Theme "Emerging Trends in Internet -based Information Services for Urban and Rural Agricultural Development: an international perspective".

The purpose of this case study describes the initiatives taken by several netizen which have same interest in Urban Agriculture by developing a Social Media Group for the sake of local communities in Malaysia. In particular, the significant role of analysing social media to advance the understanding of information sharing, communication, opinion formation, and dissemination could be recognized. The social media group were named "Kebun Bandar: Jom Tanam Sendiri" (Urban Farm: Let's Plant) encourages resource-sharing, through the social media locally and globally, in the urban agricultural context. This case study on specific social media group will find the information needs of urban farmers and provide guides in Web based information services for UPM Library in meeting the information needs of urban farmers.

Social Media in the Role of Internet - based Information Services
The emerging trends in Internet - based Information Services via social media enables institutions to engage user and communities while allowing consumers to make informed decisions. Social media is one of the most important components not only on electronic commerce but also the information management. The use of social media is now widespread among the community globally. It's ease of use and accessible makes its usage rate increasing every year. The function of social media does not focussing on socialize and communication only, but now it acts as one of the channels for dissemination and information sharing among the community.

Besides that, it does facilitate and encourage social relationships among different background of people to share interests, feelings, activities and real-life connections (Vanessa, 2012). In supporting the roles of information providers, social media such as Facebook was able to meet the information needs and demands of the nation wide community. Through the Facebook Group app, various groups have been built and can be seen to this day. Members in these groups can share a variety of information and interact with one another. As highlighted by Oyza and Edwin (2015) it can be considered as a social network service cause of group centered. The researcher added, the social media could represents how people read, discover and share information. Among the Facebook group functions which are caption, picture and video posting; the ability of online communication within the context of information exchange, comments and reviews make facebook more interesting to user (Kietzmann, 2013).

The best thing in using Facebook, when someone is searching for a local solution to a problem there will be somebody comes up with an answer. Albeit the information may be false or dissemination of fake news has gone to extends, most of them still can be trusted by users because the source is within the peer group (Assaad and Gomez, 2011). Values, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of social media users were valuable in terms of user-generated content against Internet-based Information services (Wang & Li, 2014).

"Kebun Bandar: Jom Tanam Sendiri (KBJTS)" Urban Farm: Let's Plant
It's an online gardening community that uses Facebook as a platform. This group includes individuals who have a passion for self-gardening either lives in the terrace houses, bungalows or apartments. This group is intended to provide space for sharing views, opinions, feedback, tips and tricks related to horticulture and plantations in Malaysia and not commercially motivated. Among the activities allowed in this group is like asking questions and tips sharing on gardening in Malaysia, open to all members of the group whether it is new or existing planter in the world of plantations.

Kebun Bandar Public Group Page

The founder of the "Kebun Bandar" Izham Alias is a graduate of Bachelor of Horticultural Science from Universiti Putra Malaysia. According to him, there is not much knowledge of gardening on the Internet in Malay language, especially involving a special tropical climate and in local nature makes him want to spread the knowledge of gardening to society. Horticulture is the science and art of planting vegetables, fruits, flowers and landscapes. Since studied in science and arts of gardening for four years at UPM, it was a waste if the knowledge was not passed on to others.

Some of the information obtained by the researcher (the results may change based on current circumstances):

    Members – 292 998
    1684 videos post
    455 albums
    8k Images/ photos post
   55 Documents (PDFs, Excel, Words, PowerPoints, html)

Besides the founder, there were 14 other members act as admins and moderators of the group. Despite the main focus of this group to provide information on how to plant in pots successfully and supporting the awareness of urban farmers among Malaysian, this group inspired others for gardening wherever you are, sharing pictures and stories which also convince people that small space still can produce food. Most of the contents discussed and shared in the group are about growing your own food such as fruit, vegetables and herbs in front and back yard, balcony or at the sidewalk of the house. The community love to explore the easy way to gardening in urban with the group members, enjoy more quality nutrients from their garden and appreciate valuable time that can be saved rather going to the market.
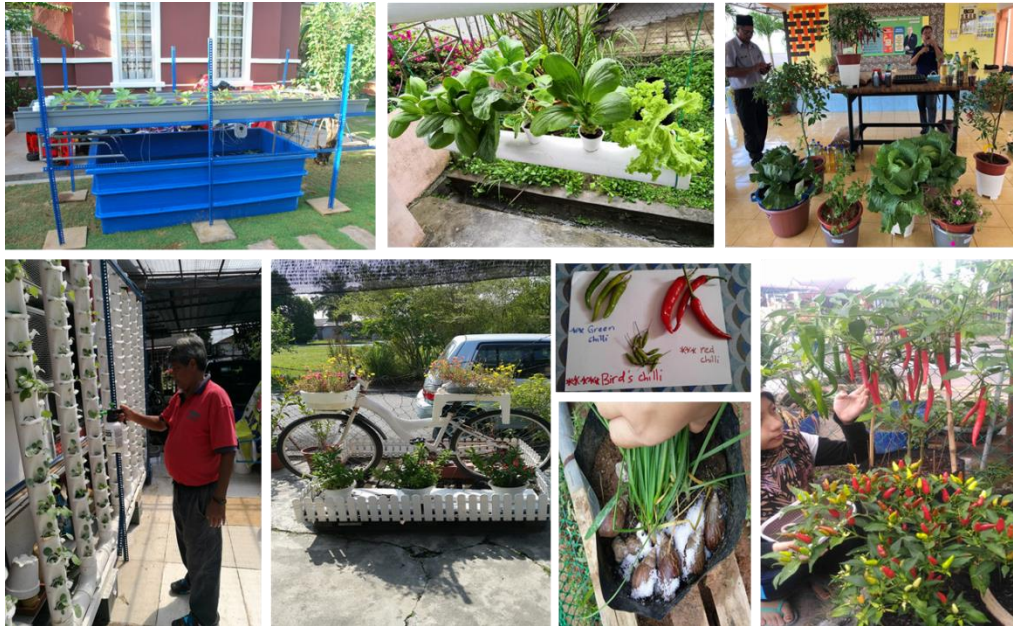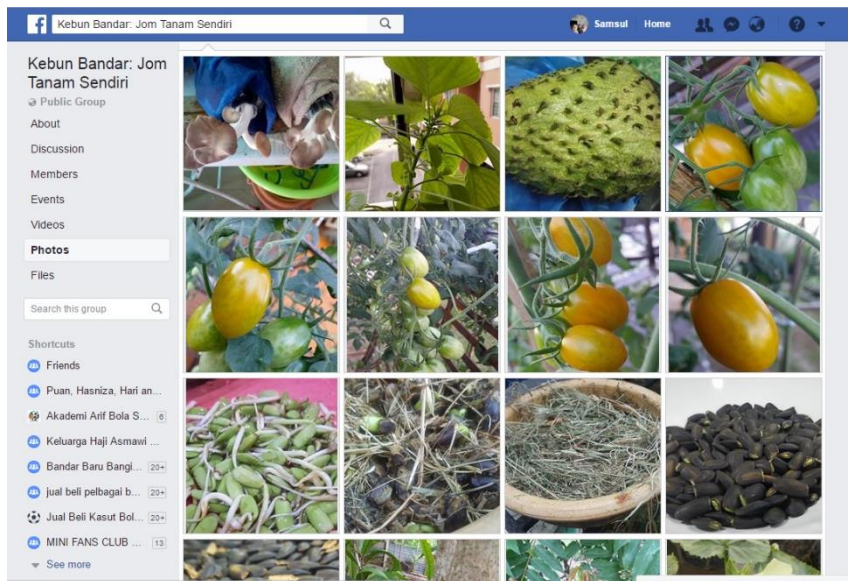
Kebun Bandar Photos

The admin of Kebun Bandar Facebook Group have clear cut the rules and guideline as a member inclusive with dos and don'ts in contributing to the group. It is an encouragement to share information such as follows:

- Planting tips and tricks
- Gardening tips
- Type of plants around the house
- Seeds / crop stems to be give away
- Gardening question
- Latest farming technologies
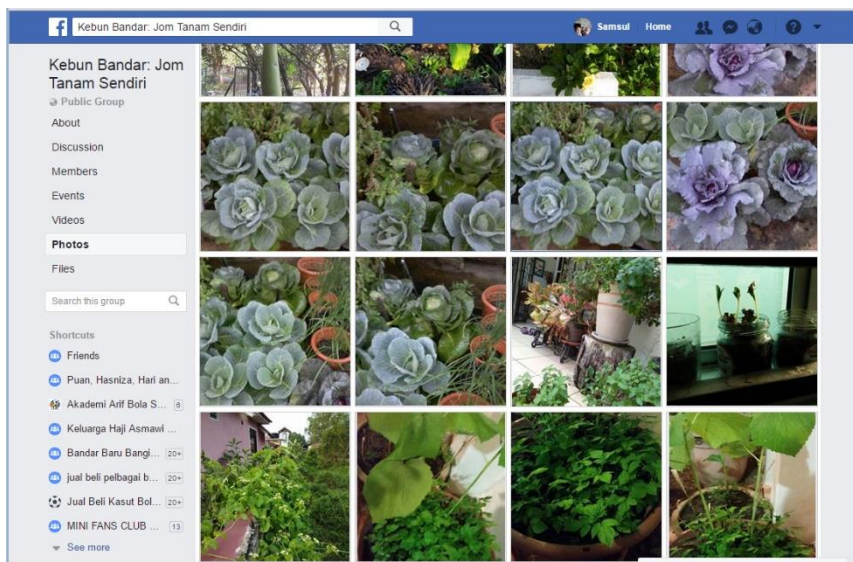
Photos shared of Vegetables and Herbs

Photos shared of Crops and Seeds

Any commercial posts (commercials and traders' recommendations) and not related with "Kebun Bandar" will cause the perpetrator to be banned from the group without any notice or warning. NO compromise! Please note. This is an example of caution being stressed out in the group by admin. As a new member they must agree to the terms stated before joining the group.

Discussions

Today's society, especially youths or better known as Gen Y, were more focused on the ease in obtaining information. They dislike getting the information through a various kind of web page or web sites which is inconvenient and waste of time. Instead of searching for the information, these generations prefer to ask questions directly in social media applications. For example, they will post a question in the "Kebun Bandar" Facebook group by asking who has this seed or fertilizer? Where to look for it? Or by posting a picture and ask who knows what tree is this? Why is my crop like this?

Good things about Facebook group, community members will respond and answer the questions immediately. Whether it is from an expert or an amateur, they will try to answer and solve the problem. It is one of the fastest and most efficient information hubs and has become the choice for today's generation. This bilateral communication was found to be very effective in delivering and obtaining information. Unlike regular web pages or organization websites provided by agencies that only work one-way and need further navigation to get specific information. However, through this two way communication relationship, one thing to be concerned is the authenticity of the information received or shared. Not all things shared or stated are true, therefore as a user we need to evaluate thoroughly, especially on the validity and accuracy of the information before accepting it.

PSAS also has its own Facebook channel to provide and disseminate the latest information. However, as one of the public university, it is bound by the ethics and policies of a government body that requires every posting is in formal form. Some of the government body, agencies or organization has long had their Facebook page or Facebook group of their own, but most of them are still low in usage and penetration. Caused of protocols and ethics in providing information and responding to a question formally, resulting in less attraction

from consumers. It is to be said not user-friendly where there is a gap between the provider and the recipient. Users will prefer a friendlier channel and which is feel closer to them.

As one of the institutions that provide Internet-based information services primarily based on agricultural, a platform with clear goals is needed. Not only in terms of content and information provided, but also include activities conducted by the admin group. For example, in terms of answering the questions posed, how long the time took, or the urge and to keep calm in giving feedback on the issues raised. Admin also plays an important role in any group or page provided. As an administrator must ensure that content is shared and discussed properly and always be controlled.

Among the things that can be used as guideline in providing Internet-based information services in the context of social media:
1) provides a clear platform with an explaination of the objectives, functions and roles of admin.
2) explain the do's and don'ts.
3) ensure the information that is shared is true and does not involve sensitive matters.
4) regularly monitored.
5) all posting and information sharing is less formal.

Through these functions, members in the group can share a variety of information, can express various kinds of opinions, share feelings and can apply various types of questions to the community.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Using the information obtained from social media, researchers can gain valuable insights into the beliefs, values, attitudes, and perceptions of social media users with regard to the utility of user-generated content and trust formation. Consequently, such information can help information provider monitor the perceptions of people regarding social networks and aid organizations in strategic planning. This paper may be used as an initiative of information service management and also as a useful research tool that may help and assist other information providers from other countries in facilitating their diverse communities. In addition, this paper can provide guidance and best practice to other libraries in the region on information service development initiatives that will benefit the next generation libraries in enhancing their services. The paper however does not describe the details on the founder of the specific social media group.

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