

Support Services through @UT_Makassar: a case in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia is an archipelago that consists of more than 17,000 islands. Universitas Terbuka (UT) offers educational programs through open and distance learning mode to serve people who cannot be reached by conventional higher education. To serve educational access for people in all over Indonesia area, UT opens regional offices in the area that need it. UPBJJ-UT Makassar is a regional office of UT in Makassar, covering South Sulawesi areas. UPBJJ-UT Makassar has approximately 20,000 students. To communicate with students and provide support services, UPBJJ-UT Makassar tries to introduce a social network media, i.e. twitter services @UT_Makassar. Despite being developed less than one year ago, the twitter service @UT_Makassar has ranked 40th on <http://twitaholic.com> (by followers in 'Makassar, South Sulawesi'). Until June 4th 2013, there were 1,453 tweets and 300 followers of @UT_Makassar. The objectives of this report are (1) to describe the message content of @UT_Makassar, (2) to analyze student's responses to @UT_Makassar, and (3) to examine the effectiveness @UT_Makassar in increasing the student's intention to re-enroll. A content analysis method was employed to a random sample of 125 messages to reveal message substance from @UT_Makassar. The survey method was used to gain data for describing student responses to @UT_Makassar. Meanwhile, comparison of two groups of students who follow and who don't was used to test the effectiveness of @UT_Makassar for improving student's intention of re-enrollment. The research results show that the tweets of @UT_Makassar contain of reply tweets to students' asking (29.72%), news about UT occasions (22.19%), series of tweets about certain issues, such as describing how to study in ODL environment (15.17%), re-tweets messages relevant to the students, for instance an information from Directorate Higher Education concerning scholarship (9.62%), greetings (8,75%), information from UT (8.38%), and link to a web sources (6.13%). Most of students (84,4%) following @UT_Makassar was new users of twitter and @UT_Makassar stimulates them to have twitter account and then to communicate with each others. All students in the sample considered that @UT_Makassar were useful for them. However there were no evidences that following @UT_Makassar meant that the intention to re-enroll was high. It is recommended for further researches for taking account of a treatment that enable students to access @UT_Makassar intensively so that the effects toward students' intention to re-enrollment can be confirmed.

Keywords: support services, twitter, intention to re-enrollment

Indonesia is an archipelago that consists of more than 17,000 islands, stretching in between the continents of Asia and Australia and between the Indian

Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Indonesia's population is currently around 240 million. In 2010, the 60 percent of the total population were of 15-54 years old. Thus, Indonesia's population pyramid categorized as expansive type, where the majority of the population is young people. Indonesia's population density was 124 people to every square kilometer in average. The islands with top rank based on population density are: Java (1055 per km²), Bali and Nusa Tenggara (179 per km²), Sumatra (105 per km²), Sulawesi (92 per km²), and Maluku (32 per km²), Kalimantan (25 per km²), and Papua (8 per km²). Makassar Regional Office, Universitas Terbuka (UPBJJ-UT Makassar) is located in the southern part of Sulawesi, i.e. in the city of Makassar.

Participation rates in higher education in Indonesia are still relatively low. In 2012, the participation rate of higher education was 18.7%. In South Sulawesi, Makassar where the Regional Office is located, the participation rate of higher education much better (25.91%) and it was above the national average. However, this figure is much lower than participation rate of higher education in developed countries that achieve an average of 40%, for example, the USA (60%) and South Korea (90%). One alternative to increase participation in higher education is through the Universitas Terbuka (UT) which is enabled to reach the islands in Indonesian through open and distance learning of higher education.

Higher education in open and distance learning (ODL) has been associated with higher rate of drop-out. Some literatures have recorded that drop-out rate in ODL varies from 20 to 50 percent (ERIC, 1984; Brawer, 1996; Carr, 2000; Kerka, 1995; Parker, 1999). Some open and distance higher education, such as UT, are not applying any provision for drop-out. Students of UT may stop for re-enrollment in any time and start for re-enrollment again in any time else. However, students of UT may decide themselves to be drop-out by discontinue re-enrollment for good. Therefore, in UT, the re-enrollment rates indicate students' drop out. In UPBJJ-UT Makassar, 43,17% of new students who enroll UT in 2010 are not re-enrolled in 2011 (UPBJJ-UT Makassar, 2011). Thus, as same as other higher education in ODL, UPBJJ-UT Makassar has been faced with the high rate drop-out problem which is indicated by high percentage of non re-enrollment students.

Tait (2000) has categorized the function of support services to students as (1) cognitive, which is to support and develop through the mediation of students with instructional materials and other learning resources, (2) affective, which is to provide an environment that supports students, creates commitment, and increase self-confidence, (3) systemic, i.e. to establish administrative processes and management information system that is effective, transparent, and accessible to students. Cognitive support services in UT have been provided through face-to-face tutorial, online tutorials and other learning resources which are delivered through online. Meanwhile, although there are several services at UT for handling student complaints, such as CRM, affective and systemic support services are still not widely available.

Affective and systemic support services in ODL institution need to be provided through a technology that allows students in a variety of places and chances to use it. Such technology is available in a popular social media and can reach out to more students. Twitter is a popular social media in Indonesia. Indonesia was ranked number five in the world for twitter users, after the United Kingdom, Japan, Brazil, and the United States. In fact, the capital city of Indonesia, Jakarta, is the of the most twitter

users in the world, surpassing Tokyo and London (Bennett, 2012). Therefore, UPBJJ-UT Makassar began developing support services through the twitter account @UT_Makassar on February 29, 2012. Until June 2013, @UT_Makassar has been delivered 1,457 messages to 300 followers. Moreover, @UT_Makassar has ranked 40th on <http://twitaholic.com> (based on number of followers in 'Makassar, South Sulawesi').

The purpose of this study was (1) to analyze the message contents from the @UT_Makassar, (2) to explore students' utilization of @UT_Makassar, and (3) to examine the effectiveness @UT_Makassar in improving student intentions of re-enrollment. Analysis of content messages of @UT_Makassar was achieved by taking randomly 200 messages and categorized these messages according to its content. A survey method was employed to explore the patterns of students' utilization of @UT_Makassar. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of @UT_Makassar in increasing the intention of re-enrollment was examined by group comparison between followers and non-followers of @UT_Makassar. Variable re-enrollment intention consists of indicators: attitudes, normative values and the level of control (Francis, 2004). The three indicators were applied to measure the variable of students' re-enrollment intention. Instrument for measuring the intention of re-enrollment consisted of 16 Likert scale items. The reliability of the instrument was indicated by alpha Cronbach = 0.813.

Research Results

1. The Message Contents of @UT_Makassar

There are some practical terms used in twitter communication, such as tweet, follower, mention, reply, and re-tweet. Tweet is a message written by a twitter account. Follower to a twitter account is a person who will receive messages every time that account writes a tweet. Mention means sending a message to other twitter account. Reply is sending a message as a reply to a message coming from other twitter account. Re-tweet is a forwarding message received by a twitter account to its followers. Based on kinds of twitter communication, the tweets of @UT_Makassar contain of reply tweets to students' asking (29.72%), news about UT occasions (22.19%), series of tweets about certain issues, such as describing how to study in ODL environment (15.17%), re-tweets messages relevant to the students, for instance an information from Directorate Higher Education concerning scholarship (9.62%), greetings (8,75%), information from UT (8.38%), and link to a web sources (6.13%). The following tweet is an example of link to a web source and it was the first message from @UT_Makassar in 29th February 2012 to inform students that there was a general lecture by visiting professor which was broadcasting lively through video streaming at ut.ac.id/seminar-dan-kuliah.



The contents of @UT_Makassar designed to organize information (1) from UPBJJ-UT to students, (2) from students to UPBJJ-UT, and (3) among students. Based

on Koul & Bhatt (1989) concerning support service activities, the messages of @UT_Makassar explained by those three activities support services, namely providing information, advice, and counseling. The support service could include of: (1) making sure distance study is the right choice, (2) how to choose the right course, (3) how to apply for a course, (4) financial assistance and how to apply for it, (5) coping successfully with unfamiliar technologies, (6) how to write essays, (7) how to prepare for examinations, (8) strategies for overcoming 'exam anxiety', and (9) planning for a new career (Asian Development Bank, 1999). Adapting these areas of support services, the support service messages of @UT_Makassar categorized by (1) UT as an ODL institution, (2) courses, (3) registration, (4) financial administration, (5) learning technique, (6) technology, (7) examination, and (8) others. Thus, the contents of the message in the @UT_Makassar categorized on the matrix with columns consisting of three categories of activities and row of support services which consisting of eight categories of support service messages. Based on a sample of 200 randomly selected messages from the 1451 messages of @UT_Makassar, then we had obtained Table 1.

In Table 1, informing about UT was the most frequent sending messages (22.4%) from @UT_Makassar. Some examples of message in this category were the two messages below, sent in March 15th 2012 and September 9th, 2012 respectively.



The first message was informing that UT was a state university founded in December 4th 1984 by the president's decree. The second was delivering the message that Prof. Ir. Tian Belawati, M.Ed., Ph.D. was the rector of UT as well as the president of ICDE.

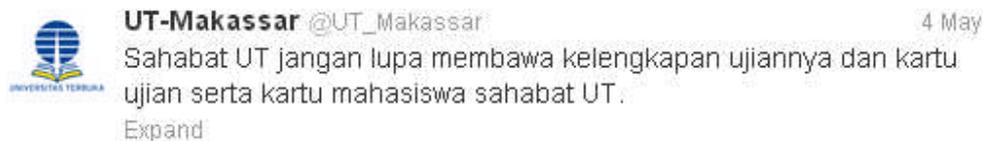
Advising about learning technique was the second most frequent message (13.0%) of @UT_Makassar. The message about learning technique is very important because it is the core of support services to accustom students with ODL's learning environment. The message below was advising the students to learn first from the printed learning material before they attended face-to-face tutorial.



Table 1. Message Contents of @UT_Makassar

		Activity			Total
		Informing	Advising	Counselling	
Material	Institution (Universitas Terbuka)	44 (22.0%)	13 (6.5%)	0 (0.0%)	57 (28.5%)
	Courses	7 (3.5%)	7 (3.5%)	4 (2.0%)	18 (9.0%)
	Registration	3 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (7.0%)	17 (8.5%)
	Financial Administration	3 (1.5%)	3 (1.5%)	8 (4.0%)	14 (7.0%)
	Learning Technique	12 (6.0%)	26 (13.0%)	2 (1.0%)	40 (20.0%)
	Technology	4 (2.0%)	2 (1.0%)	2 (1.0%)	8 (4.0%)
	Examination	1 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.5%)
	Others	18 (9.0%)	20 (10.0%)	7 (3.5%)	45 (22.5%)
Total		92 (46.0%)	71 (35.5%)	37 (18.5%)	200 (100.0%)

Messages about examination was the most rarely message of @UT_Makassar (0.5%), whereas such the messages are likely the main concern of the students. For example, they need advice about how to prepare for examination, how to cope with examination anxiety, and so on. The only one message in the sample concerning examination was the message below.



The message above was reminding the students to bring document needed for examination, such as identity card and examination card as well. The message was sent towards an examination date.

The messages, categorized as “others” in Table 1, some of them consisted of motivational messages or news taken from other sources such as online newspaper.



Rumah Mufida @rumahmufida

5 Oct

anda tdk akan tau pilihan yg anda ambil dpt membawa kegagalan
mwpun kesuksesan Kalau Belum anda COBA dan menjalaninya
sampai Akhir #Motivasi

Retweeted by UT-Makassar

Expand

The above message was categorized as “others” category. It was a motivational message, it said that “You don’t know if your choice lead to failure or success until you TRY and walk on till the end”. The message below was also belong to “others” category. The message, sent at October 1st 2012, contained news about that day was the Batik Day. Batik is a traditional textile in Indonesia.



UT-Makassar @UT_Makassar

1 Oct

Selamat pagi Sahabat UT. Selamat Hari Batik Nasional. Mari kita jaga
kekayaan batik Negara Indonesia.

Expand

2. Students’ utilization of @UT_Makassar

Followers of @UT_Makassar are dominated by young adult between 17 to 20 year old (84.7%). Most of them are female students (70.8%). The majority of the students (84.4%) who follow @UT_Makassar is new user of twitter and have a twitter account in 2012 or 2013, only 6.3% students who have twitter account since 2009. In fact, many students created the twitter account during freshman orientation. The ICT team of UPBJJ-UT Makassar assisted them to create their own twitter account to access @UT_Makassar. As early users of twitter, the students who follow @UT_Makassar can be classified as active users because most of them (66.7%) already have more than 20 followers, and 33.3% of them have less than 20 followers. From the observation of messages, it is known that their followers are fellows of UT students. Thus, the presence of @UT_Makassar has encouraged students to have a twitter account and then they interact among themselves.

The activities of UPBJJ-UT Makassar students in accessing @UT_Makassar showed in Table 2. The table showed that the student who follow @UT_Makassar were fairly active, they sent a message to @UT_Makassar (51.7%), replied to a message from @UT_Makassar (47.9%), and forwarded the message of @UT_Makassar to their own followers. Nevertheless, they were relatively rare access to @UT_Makassar, most of them (97.9%) did not access to @UT_Makassar every day.

Most of the students (83.2%) who follow @UT_Makassar used desktop computers or portable computers to access @UT_Makassar. Only few of them (29.1%) used mobile phones to read messages of @UT_Makassar. The total percentage could be more than 100% because respondents might choose more than one option of tools that used for retrieving messages of @UT_Makassar. The low use of mobile phones to access the message of @UT_Makassar explained why they were rarely access the @UT_Makassar. Students who can access Twitter from mobile phones will have easy access to @UT_Makassar and can access it more frequently. Based on observations in the field, many students were accessing twitter via computer in the reading room of

UPBJJ-UT Makassar. They took turns using the computers that only two units were available.

Tabel 2. Students' Utilization of @UT_Makassar

Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Mention to @UT_Makassar		
• Yes	28	51.7
• No	20	48,3
Reply to @UT_Makassar		
• Yes	23	47.9
• No	28	52.1
Re-tweet messages from @UT_Makassar		
• Yes	26	55.2
• No	22	44.8
Frequency of Accessing @UT_Makassar		
• Every Days	1	2.1
• 2 to 5 times a week	12	25.5
• once a week	12	25.5
• 2 to 3 in a month	9	19.1
• Once a month	11	23.4
• Others	1	2.1
Tools use for accessing @UT_Makassar		
• Personal Computer (Desktop)	5	10.4
• Laptop/Notebook/Net-book	35	72.9
• Mobile phone	14	29.1
• Others	0	0
Messages Frequently Read		
• Announcement from UT	36	75
• Greetings	12	25
• Answer to a question	9	18.7
• Information Re-tweet by @UT_Makassar	9	18.7
• Series of tweets about specific cases	1	2
• Others	0	0

About 75% followers of @UT_Makassar had read announcement messages from Universitas Terbuka. Furthermore, 25% of @UT_Makassar followers read greeting messages. The reply messages of students' question were read by 18.7% followers. The re-tweeted messages were also read by 18.7% followers. The following conversation is between a student and @UT_Makassar about the examination results.



@UT_Makassar was also as an instrument for students to interact between them. They shared information about learning activities and gave support to each other, as the following tweet:



3. Effect of following @UT_Makassar

To examine the effect of following @UT_Makassar on intention of re-enrollment, two groups of students who follow and not follow @UT_Makassar were assigned purposively. The group of @UT_Makassar followers consisted of 86 students and 55 students belong to non follower group. The two groups were given a questioner to determine the level of re-enrollment intention. The results demonstrated that the average of follower and non follower was 61.65 and 64.27 respectively. Since the variances of the two groups were unequal then the difference test used the second column in the Table 3 which was not assumed equal variances between groups. The statistical decision was that the two groups had an equally average score on intention of re-enrollment at UT. Therefore, there was no evidence that following @UT_Makassar affected to the re-enrollment intention.

Low intensity of accessing @UT_Makassar could be considered as a factor in explaining why following @UT_Makassar did not effect on increasing the intention of re-enrollment at UT. As mentioned earlier, followers who access @UT_Makassar every day were only 2.1% and the most of followers read the messages of @UT_Makassar rarely. The obstacle in accessing @UT_Makassar could be associated with difficulty as new users to twitter and they just began to accustom with @UT_Makassar. In addition, the relatively low percentage of students who used mobile phone to open @UT_Makassar (29.1%) most likely contributed to low level of intensity of students' experiences with @UT_Makassar. The factors of new users of twitter and equipment used to access @UT_Makassar made up low intensity of students' exposure to

@UT_Makassar and in turn could be a part of the cause of the lacking of improving students' intention of re-enrollment at Universitas Terbuka.

Table 3. Testing the differences of Re-enrollment Intentions

		Total	
		Equal variances assumed	Equal variances not assumed
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	14,746	
	Sig.	,000	
t-test for Equality of Means	T	1,987	1,839
	Df	139	87,163
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,049	,069
	Mean Difference	2,62156	2,62156
	Std. Error Difference	1,31933	1,42578
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
	Lower	,01301	-,21225
	Upper	5,23012	5,45538

4. Conclusion

Twitter account @UT_Makassar developed with the aim of providing support services to the student and a place for student to interact with UPBJJ-UT Makassar. Students who follow @UT_Makassar could be categorized as active users because they mentioned, replied, and re-tweet the message sent by @UT_Makassar. Most of the students use twitter via desktop or portable computers, only a small percentage who use mobile phones so that they rarely access the @UT_Makassar. The most frequent messages they receive from @UT_Makassar is the announcement of UT and greeting messages. The t-test showed that both groups of students who follow and not follow the @UT_Makassar had similar intentions of re-enrollment at UT. It can be concluded that participation in the @UT_Makassar, in this study, was not shown to have an impact on increasing student intentions of re-registration. Need further research to explain whether this result was due to the low intensity of the students' exposure to the @UT_Makassar. Thus, further studies need to include treatment that allows students intensively accessing messages on @UT_Makassar.

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