STUDENT-UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION MEDIA USING WEB 2.0

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ABSTRACT

Web 2.0 has become very widely to develop many web-based systems. Web 2.0 tools have changed the nature of web-based applications especially those are used for communication purposes. The Forums, Wikis, Blogs, Social Networking, Video Sharing and other Web 2.0 tools are used to communicate web users with each other in effective way for many purposes. In Universiti Technologi Malaysia (UTM), the communication process between postgraduate students and School of Graduate Studies (SPS) is done by Face-to-Face, phone, fax, Email and post. There are many communication problems encountered by the postgraduate students before and after they registered as students. This project was conducted to propose a Student-University Communication Media model using the Web 2.0 and use it to develop a prototype of Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal. The Object Oriented Approach was used to develop the prototype of Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal. Eventually, the prototype was implemented and tested. However, the organizational strategy of implementing the prototype by SPS was formulated. The User Acceptance Testing was conducted by thirty users with more than 95% of them satisfied with the developed portal and confirmed that it is easy to use, functional and useful.
ABSTRAK

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE PAGE</td>
<td></td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td></td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td></td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td></td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td></td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td></td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td></td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td></td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Problem Background 3
1.3 Problem Statement 4
1.4 Objectives of the Project 5
1.5 Scopes of The Project 6
1.6 Significance of The Project 6
   1.6.1 Students Perspective 7
   1.6.2 UTM Perspective 7
1.7 Chapter Summary 8
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction 9
2.2 Web 2.0 Definition and Tools 10
  2.2.1 Web 2.0 Definitions 12
2.3 Web 2.0 Technology Tools and Services 13
  2.3.1 Blogs 14
  2.3.2 Wikis 15
  2.3.3 Tagging and social bookmarking 15
  2.3.4 Multimedia sharing 16
  2.3.5 Audio blogging and podcasting 17
  2.3.6 RSS and syndication 17
  2.3.7 Newer Web 2.0 services and applications 17
2.4 Web 2.0 Framework 19
  2.4.1 Web 2.0 Key Parts 20
  2.4.2 Web 2.0 Characteristics 20
2.5 Using Web 2.0 in Higher Education 22
  2.5.1 Models of Integrating Web 2.0 in HE 23
  2.5.2 Web 2.0 Opportunities and Challenges for HE 30
2.6 Using Web 2.0 as Communication Media 32
  2.6.1 Computer-Mediated Communication 32
2.7 Useful Case Studies on SPS website 35
  2.7.1 Knowledge Sharing Portal for Postgraduate Students 36
  2.7.2 Usability Study of SPS Website for Customer 36
2.8 Chapter Summary 38

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction 39
3.2 Project Workflow 40
3.3 Operational Framework 41
3.4 Phases Descriptions 42
  3.4.1 Phase A: Initial Planning 48
  3.4.2 Phase B: Research 48
4 ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Organization Analysis
   4.2.1 The School of Graduate Studies (SPS)
       4.2.1.1 Graduate Studies Admin Structure

4.3 Current System Analysis
   4.3.1 Document Analysis
   4.3.2 Analysis on Interviews
   4.3.3 Questionnaire Analysis
   4.3.4 Conclusion of the Analysis Techniques:
   4.3.5 Weaknesses of Using the Current Communication Media

4.4 Analysis of Proposed System
   4.4.1 Analysis on Interview
   4.4.2 Questionnaire Analysis

4.5 User Requirements
   4.5.1 Functional Requirements:
   4.5.2 Non-Functional Requirements

4.6 Comparison between SPS Website and the Proposed Portal

4.7 Proposed Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Model

4.8 Chapter Summary
5 PROTOTYPE DESIGN

5.1 Introduction 101

5.2 Conceptual Design 102
  5.2.1 Use Case Model 102
  5.2.2 Sequence Diagram 106
  5.2.3 Activity Diagram 106
  5.2.4 Class Diagram 109

5.3 Physical Design 110
  3.5.1 Database Design 110
  3.5.2 Windows Navigation Diagram 110
  3.5.3 Prototype Interface Design 112
    3.5.3.1 Main Menu Design 112
    3.5.3.2 Communication Menu Design 113
    3.5.3.3 Knowledge Sharing Menu Design 133

5.4 Chapter Summary 134

6 IMPLEMENTATION AND TESTING

6.1 Introduction 136

6.2 Coding Approach 137
  6.2.1 Portal Database Implementation 137

6.3 Testing Plan 138
  6.3.1 Unit Testing 138
  6.3.2 Integration Testing 139
    6.3.2.1 User Interface Testing 139
    6.3.2.2 Use Case Testing 140
  6.3.3 System Testing 141
    6.3.3.1 Requirement Testing 141
    6.3.3.2 Usability Testing 142
    6.3.3.3 Security Testing 144
  6.3.4 User Acceptance Test 145

6.4 Chapter Summary 154
7 ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

7.1 Introduction 156
7.2 Roll-Out Strategy 157
  7.2.1 Step1: Organize Introduction Meeting with SPS 159
  7.2.2 Step2: Appoint the Implementation Team 159
  7.2.3 Step3: Enhance the System 160
  7.2.4 Step 4: Launch the System 161
  7.2.5 Step5: Train the System Users 164
  7.2.6 Step 6: Maintain the System 165
  7.2.7 Step 7: Organizational Support 165
  7.2.8 Step 8: Change Management 166
7.3 Expected Organizational Benefits 166
7.4 Chapter Summary 167

8 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction 168
8.2 Achievements 169
8.3 Constraints and Challenges 171
8.4 Aspirations 172
8.5 System Limitation and Future Work 173
8.6 Chapter Summery 174

REFERENCES 175

APPENDICES A - J 178-232
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE NO.</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>What is Web 2.0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Models of integrating Web 2.0 technologies in HE</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Phases Descriptions</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Minimal Requirements of Hardware</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Software Requirements</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>SPS Website Main Menu Functions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Weaknesses of Using the Current Communication Media</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Faculties of Respondent Students</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Students satisfaction of the current SPS website</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Prospective Students Communication Problems</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>The Current Students Communication Problems</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Common Features of Communication Media Portal</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Prospective and Current Students Recommendations</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Using Web 2.0 tools for Communication</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Using Web 2.0 by UTM Faculties’ Students</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Web 2.0 Tools for SPS Rules Enquiry</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Web 2.0 tools for Online Application Status Enquiry</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Web 2.0 for Displaying SPS Website Information</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>Web 2.0 Knowledge Sharing Tools</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>Web 2.0 for Academic Resources</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>Functional Requirements</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>Non-Functional Requirements</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.18 Comparison between SPS Website and the Proposed Portal

4.19 Analysis Feedback about Proposed Portal Advantages and Challenges

4.20 Web 2.0 Student-University Communication Media Model Layers

4.21 Web 2.0 tools for Communication Modules

5.1 Actors Roles

6.1 User Interface Testing.

6.2 Speed of Performance Test Report

6.3 User Login Class Testing

6.4 Lists of the UAT Respondents’ Background

6.5 SPS Staff Evaluation of Portal Ease of Use

6.6 Postgraduate Students Evaluation of Portal Ease of Use

6.7 SPS Staff Evaluation of Portal Functionality

6.8 Postgraduate Students Evaluation of Portal Functionality

6.9 Evaluation of Portal Usefulness for SPS Staff

6.10 Evaluation of Portal Usefulness for Postgraduate Students

6.11 SPS Staff Satisfaction

6.12 Postgraduate Students Satisfaction

7.1 Characteristics of Conversion Strategies

7.2 Conversion Strategies for Student-University Communication Media Portal
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE NO.</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Literature Review Structure</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Web 2.0 Framework</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>The Process Model of the Web-based Learning Community</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>The Structure Model of Web 2.0- Based Learning Community</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>The Overall Structure of Network Education Supporting System</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>The Structure of Learning Module</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Model of Proposed International Students Knowledge Sharing Portal</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Main page of SPS prototype website.</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Project Workflow Steps</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Project Operational Framework</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Academic and Administrative structure of SPS</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>SPS Website Features</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>The methods of applying for admission in UTM</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Communication problems before coming to UTM</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>The used communication media for solving admission problems</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Communication problems after coming to UTM</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Face-to-Face communication way with SPS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.8 UTM unites and communication problems 66
4.9 SPS staff and solving communication problems 66
4.10 Students Satisfaction with the Current Communication Media with SPS 67
4.11 Student Satisfaction with the SPS officers help 67
4.12 The need to new communication media with UTM 68
4.13 Web2.0 tools used by students 68
4.14 Students Programs 74
4.15 Local against International Students 75
4.16 Students Nationalities 75
4.17 Faculties of Respondent Students 76
4.18 Period of stay of students in the university 77
4.19 Applying Methods to UTM 81
4.20 Communication Purposes 86
4.24 Proposed Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Model 97
4.25 Proposed Web2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal 100
5.1 The main Use Case Diagram 104
5.2 The Details of Communicate by Portal Tools Use Case 105
5.3 The Details of Share Knowledge Use-Case 105
5.4 Student Activity Diagram 107
5.5 SPS Staff Activity Diagram 108
5.6 Class Diagram 109
5.7 Windows Navigation Diagram 111
5.8 Main Menu Module 113
5.9 Communication Modules 114
5.10 Prompted Login Page 114
5.11 General Enquiry Module 115
5.12 List of SPS Staff Contact Information. 116
5.13 SPS E-mail Form 116
5.14 Create New Message by UTM Account Messaging 117
5.15 UTM Messaging Account- New Message Notification 118
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section Number</th>
<th>Section Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>UTM Messaging Account Inbox</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>UTM Messaging Account – Read Message and Reply</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>General Enquiry Forum</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>Add Forum Topic</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>General Enquiry Chat Room (Student Side)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>General Enquiry Chat Room (Admin Side)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>SPS Management Staff Contact Information (SPS Email Form)</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>Contact University Forum (SPS Management Staff)</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>Contact University Online Chat (SPS Management Staff)</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>Admission Requirements Forum</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>Admission Requirements Blogs</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>Admission Requirement Blog (Add Comment)</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>UTM Wiki (Home Page)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>Admission Requirements Wiki Page</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>Editing Admission Requirements Wiki Page</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>Online Application Status Module</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>University Rules and Services Module</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>SPS Video Sharing Page</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>SPS RSS News Feeds</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>SPS RSS News Subscription</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>The RSS Feeds added into the use browser.</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>Knowledge Sharing Menu</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>SPS Social Networking</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>SPS Deputy Dean UAT Answer</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>The Most Desired Web 2.0 Communication Tools by SPS Staff</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>The Most Desired Web 2.0 Communication Tools by Postgraduate Students</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Roll-Out Strategy Processes</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Conversion Strategies</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPENDIX</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Interview With SPS Assistant</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>The Online Questionnaires</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Interview With SPS Staff (SPS Assistant Executer)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Printed Questionnaire</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Use Case Descriptions</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sequence Diagram</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Black-Box Unit Testing</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Use Case Testing</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>User Acceptance Test Questionnaire</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Gantt Chart</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

PROJECT OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Universiti Technologi Malaysia (UTM) is the largest engineering-based university, located at the southern section of Peninsular Malaysia. It is well-known for being the pioneer of engineering and technological knowledge and expertise. UTM has more than 10 research alliance, and 28 centers of excellence, in addition to academic faculties. There are more than 16,036 full-time undergraduate students at UTM and more than 5,000 enrolled on distance learning programmes as part-time students. In addition, there are 6432 postgraduate students, 1762 of them are international students in various fields of specialization. Since the 1990s, the number of International students has been increased, especially in postgraduate programs. (www.utm.my, 2010).

UTM serves students by providing many web-based systems. In addition to the UTM website, there are E-Learning System, Online Registration System, Online Application System and other systems, which are Web 1.0-based systems.
Web 1.0 is the first generation of the World Wide Web (WWW). The Web 1.0 sites are static, which contain information that might be useful, but there's no reason for a visitor to return to the site later. An example might be a personal Web page that gives information about the site's owner, but never changes. Also, Web 1.0 sites are not interactive, which means that the visitors can only visit these sites; they can't impact or contribute to the sites. And Web 1.0 applications are proprietary, which means that under the Web 1.0 philosophy, companies develop software applications that users can download, but they can't see how the application works or change it. (Strickland, 2010)

In the current UTM website and its online systems, the students’ interactions and contributions are very weak. Furthermore, online communication between students and the university is not provided, except the use of E-mails. This project is aimed at developing a Student-University Communication Media Portal using Web 2.0.

Web 2.0 is proposed because it facilitates interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration on the World Wide Web, examples of Web 2.0 are web-based communities, hosted services, web applications, social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, forum, and other tools. A Web 2.0 site allows users to interact with each other, or to change website content in contrast to non-interactive websites where users are limited to the passive viewing of information that is provided to them (Wikipedia, 2010).

The term Web 2.0 is closely associated with Tim O'Reilly because of the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 conference in 2004. Although the term suggests a new version of the World Wide Web, it does not refer to an update to any technical specifications, but rather to cumulative changes in the ways software developers and end-users use the Web. (O'Reilly 2005)
This chapter contains the problem background, problem statement, objectives, scopes, significance and summary of the project. The continuing sections of the project are categorized into the following chapters: Literature Review, Research Methodology, Analysis, Prototype Design, Implementation and Testing, Organizational Strategy, and Discussion and Conclusion.

1.2 Problem Background

Although UTM has many online web-based systems, the current student-university communication media are e-mail, phone, post, and fax. There is no web-based communication system in place. The students need to use these media in order to enquire about admission requirements, online application status, UTM rules and services, and to solve any academic or non-academic issue.

For example, the process of admission can be done while in the university, by posting the documents, or by using the online application system. The School of Graduate Studies (SPS) is the responsible unit in UTM for the communication with postgraduate students. Every semester, more than 3000 postgraduate students apply to study in UTM using the online application system (according to SPS Assistant Registrar), but many students are rejected due to many reasons, one of which is the miscommunication between SPS and students, especially the international students. The SPS staffs use the phone, fax, post, and electronic mail to contact students in case of further requirements, missing documents, incomplete application, or other problems. But, because of the huge number of prospective students and their problems, it is too difficult to solve all of their problems. Moreover, some prospective students still send the admission documents by email to their friends who study in UTM in order to get admissions.
Also, the UTM and SPS websites provide information in the form of text and downloadable forms, which are misunderstood by many students who need more explanation or want to enquire and discuss about this information online.

The use of the current communication media has many drawbacks; for example, the use of phone is expensive, misunderstood in some cases, and not sufficient in case of filling forms. The huge number of E-mails could not be managed and answered well, and might be sent to the wrong destination. The post is considered very slow and expensive compared to the online communication. Fax also is rarely used as a communication media.

However, the researcher concluded that most students and SPS staffs are not satisfied with the current communication media regarding to the cost, time, and efficiency, based on the conducted surveys and interviews.

Therefore, there is a need to have web-based communication media in UTM in order to overcome the students’ communication problems, before and after students’ registration. The Web 2.0 technology tools are proposed to be used in this Student-University Communication Media Portal.

1.3 Problem Statement

Due to the above mentioned reasons, this project will be done for answering the following questions:
1- How can the communication problems of SPS with postgraduate students be overcome using Web 2.0 technology?

i. What are the communication problems that are faced by the postgraduate students in SPS?

ii. How to identify the main requirements to develop Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal between SPS and postgraduate students?

iii. How to propose the Student-University Communication Media Portal Model?

iv. How to develop the Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal?

v. How to implement the Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal by SPS?

1.4 Objectives of the Project

To be able to answer the problem statement questions, the researcher has identified five main objectives to be achieved as the end result of the project:

i. To identify the current communication problems and the appropriate requirements needed by postgraduate students and SPS staff.

ii. To study and analyze the critical requirements of a Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal.

iii. To propose a model of Student-University Communication Media using Web 2.0 to be used in SPS.

iv. To develop a prototype of Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal.
v. To formulate organizational strategy for implementing the Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal by SPS.

1.5 Scopes of the Project

In order to achieve the objectives stated in the previous section, it is important to specify the study area and boundaries, which are stated in the following points:

i. Because the most communication problems are faced with SPS, this project with focus on this UTM units.

ii. Study and analyze the communication problems and requirements needed by the postgraduate students and SPS staff.

iii. Because the most communication problems are faced by the international students before and after they come to UTM, most of the requirements will be taken from them.

1.6 Significance of the Project

Conducting this research will help assist both postgraduate students and SPS staff to overcome the communication problems. Developing new communication media using Web 2.0 will help UTM from the following perspectives:
1.6.1 Students Perspective

i. The Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal will help the postgraduate students outside Malaysia to contact UTM faster, easier, cheaper, and effectively.

ii. The postgraduate students in UTM will save more time by solving their problems online.

iii. The postgraduate students will be more satisfied with the communication media and UTM online services.

1.6.2 UTM Perspective

i. The Web 2.0-based Student-University Communication Media Portal will help SPS to solve the postgraduate students’ problems easier and faster.

ii. SPS staff will be more comfortable and satisfied with the new communication media and they can solve postgraduate students’ problems properly.

iii. The proposed portal will reduce the time and cost of answering or making phone calls, especially the overseas calls.

iv. The new communication media can be considered as advantage for UTM.

v. Improve and enhance the UTM online services.
Interview with SPS Staff

1- What are the most important processes that need a communication with students?

2- For each process,
   a. How do you currently contact with students? What is the most communication media used to contact with students?
   b. What are the important types of information to be exchanged?
   c. Is the current communication media sufficient to solve students’ problems?
   d. Do you need a new communication media that depend on the web to exchange information and allow students to enrich the SPS Website Data?

3- For the Perspective Students, SPS Website provides a list of useful links that may not cover all the students’ cases.
   a. Do you need a General Forum or Online Chat to allow prospective students to ask about their specific needs?
   b. The information in SPS Website are scattered and very difficult to find a desired one, do you need to re-organize the Information to be easy to retrieve and search?
   c. Can we allow users to add some contents as (Blogs) or (Wikis) to enrich the information related to SPS?
   d. After the perspective student apply online application, can he use his account to contact with specialist clerk?

4- For the Online application, the most important application used by all the perspective students.
   a. What are the processes that must be done online to get offer letter? (9 processes)
   b. How do you contact students with every process to solve any problem?
   c. After the students apply and get account, can they enquiry about their status and discuss about any problem? How? Can be solved online?
d. As the website shows, in the case of any trouble/problem, the way to communicate with students is the phone or the email. Is that enough to solve all students’ problems?

e. Should every perspective students have an account with ability to enquiry and discuss about their problem online?

5- For the current students, the SPS Website provides information about Calender, Important Dates, download Tuition fee forms, time table for university elective subjects, and three links for course registration and records.

a. The same problem of non-organized information. Can we re-organize the information to academic and non-academic?

b. The information is not clear for those who are new students, like the ACID account. Can the students have Forum/chat/blogs or any type of online discussion to explain that useful information clearly?

c. The current students are very important category in the SPS website, but it contains very poor information and it’s very static. Can students have online community to be the voice of all postgraduate students? (by using forums/blogs and etc).

d. Can we use the ACID account to be communicate with SPS online to solve any problem?

6- In the related part (category) : Student Life. It contains a list of links, most of them are not working. The working links are: (CICT), PSZ, counseling links.

a. Can we provide an online community for post graduate students, by which they can share their knowledge/expertise and enrich the UTM-related information?

7- The Fifth category in the SPS website is the Academic Resources. It contains a list of downloadable forms.

a. Can we provide a way of online discussion or advanced way of search to get the required information?

b. Can students consults SPS Clerks online to solve any academic problem?

8- The sixth category in SPS website is for Non-Graduate students. It contains tow downloadable forms.
a. Can they use online way of communication with SPS Staff to enquiry about any information or solve any problem as we mentioned before for the current students?

9- The News in SPS are shown in the right side of the SPS Website.
   a. Can we find a way to send these news/updated news to students?

10- In the (contact us) part, can we use online way to contact rather than email and phones? Which one you prefer?

11- Finally, Are there any other problem (not related to the SPS website) that encounter SPS staff during contacting students? Can they be solved online? By chat, forum or any web2.0 tools?