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Social networking as a tool for student learning and student engagement in higher education: A conceptual framework

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Abstract

Social Networking with bounded system as a communication medium are getting acceptance by the students especially in higher education. The universities across the world now understand the landscape of the social networking to support the communication with the students academically so that there is increased student learning and student engagement. Social Networking as an ecosystem in the educational arena is accepted and has produced enormous benefits to the students.

The present study is a theoretical study of the Social Networking as a facilitator for the students in the learning process and how it would enable student engagement.

Keywords: Students, Learning, Stakeholders, Communication Technologies

1. Introduction

During the last two decades the world, in general and India, in particular has witnessed for remarkable changes in Information Technology (IT). The advancement in IT led to the emergence of Social Networking Sites (SNS). SNS are currently being used regularly by millions of people. The usage of SNS has been so widespread that they have caught the attention of academics worldwide. SNS are now being investigated by numerous social science researchers. An increasing number of social scientists are developing interest in studying SNS, because of its impact on society. Further, the usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) among the people of India is evidently increasing, particularly among the Indian college students. It has invariably left a big impact on society in general and college students in particular. The term Social Networking Sites has been defined by different authors in several different ways. This leaves the reader with a feeling of being 'unsure' of its real meaning.

2. Background to social networking

The idea of a 'social network' is not new. A social network in fact refers to any structure made up of individuals (or organizations) tied to one another though some type of interdependency, such as friendship, common interest, financial exchange and so on (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology 2011). What is radically new however, is web-based social networking, which has allowed these networked structures to develop in much more extensive and elaborated ways.

Beginning with specialised online communities in the 1990s such as Geocities and Tripod.com, online social networking became a mass phenomenon in the 2000s with the development of individual user profile functions, and enhanced capacity to share activities, and interests within individual networks. Nowadays, the main social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter enjoy huge success, with Facebook – arguably the most successful of these – boasting more than 750 million users worldwide.

The appeal of social networking seems to vary. Some surveys point to more pragmatic social motives such as "staying in touch with friends, organising social activities, or flirting with someone" (Lenhart & Madden 2007, p. 23). Other studies however, allude to deeper psychological needs such as the need for a sense of belonging, or the need to project one's identity (Ridings & Gefen 2004).

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Mark Zuckerberg, the creator of Facebook, is sure that the chief appeal comes from social networking's ability to empower people by giving them a 'voice'. He is also sure that this capacity has meant that his technological creation has been overwhelmingly a force for good.

3. Social media technology ^[1]

Social media [technology] has become a growing phenomenon with many and varied definitions in public and academic use. Social media generally refer to media used to enable social interaction. It is important to note the difference between user-generated content, which is non-traditional media developed and produced by individual users, and existing content, which is usually traditional media (news, magazines, radio, and television) reproduced for the web. In addition to these features, SMT also contains design elements that create virtual social spaces encouraging interaction, thereby broadening the appeal of the technology and promoting transitions back and forth from the platform to face-to-face engagement. The use of social media interfaces through computer and mobile devices has become quite widespread, and currently, the two most prominent interfaces are Facebook and Twitter. Facebook allows users to create profiles; allows those user-operated profiles to interact with each other; allows for the expression of interests and the discovery of commonalities between users; and allows users to build and maintain connections and invite others to join a community.

In contrast, Twitter is a social media interface that enables users to share a limited amount of user-generated content, quickly and easily, to an extensive number of other users. With this interface, the communication exchange is central, and the creation and sharing of user profiles is not necessary, but Twitter can link to user profiles that exist on other social media interfaces. Commonly, the phrase "social networking sites" is used as an umbrella term for all social media and computer-mediated communication, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn,

and Myspace, as well as the inaugural social networking sites of Cyworld, Bebo and Friendster.

Ellison and Boyd (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct profiles, display user connections, and search and traverse within that list of connections. Albeit very relevant, social networking is only one layer of SMT. Reminiscent of Winston Churchill's (1939) radio address regarding the actions of Russia, social media technology is complex, much like "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma" that is continuously being investigated and briefly understood before it changes once more. As each application is experienced, other innovative technologies rapidly emerge, enabling new utilities for users. Over the last ten years, a proliferation of differentiated services have shown this to be true as micro-blogging sites such as Twitter, location-based services like Foursquare, and consumer review platforms including Yelp have all worked collaboratively to provide a totally new and engaged media experience, which has now become more accessible through mobile devices (Reuben, 2008).

4. Impact of social networks on education ^[2]

Education is very essential part of an individual's life for every teenager education is more important than anything. Today teenager shows very much interest for using social networks but unfortunately Social Networks affect education badly ^[3]. Previous research has calculated that more than 90% of college students use social networks ^[9, 10]. Technology has shown a fast development by producing small communication devices but these small communication devices can be used for accessing social networks any time anywhere, these devices include pocket computers, laptops, iPads and even simple mobile phones (which support internet) etc.

Technology is step towards betterment, no doubt but any technology which can provide ease of social networks can be dangerous for social network addicts. Providing ubiquitous facility of social networks is a straight invitation of addiction to any teenager and even an adult, as academic satisfaction is not enough for those students who suffers from social isolation ^[11]. Social Networks grab the total attention and concentration of the students and diverts them towards non educational, unethical and inappropriate actions such as useless chatting, time killing by random searching and not doing their jobs.

As social network has introduce many attractive tasks like gaming, advertisements etc. so that people can never get enough of these things. The social network addict becomes a useless node for parents, friends and other associated people. They cannot succeed because they have no sense of upcoming future and competitions in their careers. Social networks use support of difference implicit applications by virtue of which it grabs the attention of students and increase the number of users.

The applications include games, advertisements, and other online activities like online live television etc. User can use these applications free, so that's why gaming freaks and addicts use to play these games without any installation and any other formality any time anywhere, these free of cost pleasure destruct students from their education, and they do not concentrate on their education. As all of the applications are based on 2D screen play so by watching long time same screen could cause high blood pressure and anxiety which could be dangerous for education and health. According to survey students do not take their meals on time and do not sleep on time which causes a very non serious attitude with education.

All they need after addiction is use of social networks. Social network connect them with one another so they not even bother to solve their home tasks and they contact elders and seniors to help them in cloning their educational material. Social networks provide a virtual life to the students, those students who not even speak in front of anyone could feel freedom in their virtual life. When they use social networks they feel like in heaven but this addiction kills their inner self confidence for ever. Becoming addict of social networks feels like you have so many friends but in real all of the contacts are virtual contacts.

¹ Social Media in Higher Education a Literature review and research directions by Regina Deil-Amen, Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Charles H.F. Davis III and Manuel Sacramento Gonzalez Canche

² Waqas Tariq, Madiha Mehboob, M. Asfandyar Khan and FaseeUllah(2012); The Impact of Social Media and Social Networks on Education and Students of Pakistan

This act of going far from your family, friends, teachers and other associations could be very much dangerous for life and education. It changes the mindset of student completely like fantasies. This virtual life of student destructs his thoughts from education towards other activities and by living inside fantasy world student slowly starts to hate educated life and studies. One of very common action performed by almost every user on social networks is eavesdropping.

It is phenomenon of understanding the other users by spying their profiles, actions, likes, comments and other activities performed. In this regards opposite gender can be attracted by one another and to find loyalty of any friend all most each and every student spoils months and weeks on eavesdropping. According U.S. Military banned use of social networking websites on soldiers in 2007 and Canadian government banned employees from social networking websites in 2007 while U.S. Congress has proposed to block such social networking websites in schools and library. Social networking websites obligate a very negative impression people of every age including teenagers, young adults and adults are continuously attracted towards social networks, international and national jurisdiction must take action against social networking websites.

5. Social media and student learning achievements^[3]

The use of social media in academic coursework can increase the learning achieved by an individual student. Students who participate in coursework that utilize social media demonstrate an increase in overall GPA when compared with students who do not participate in social media (Junco, 2012b; Junco *et al.*, 2011). Social media usage within the academic setting not only increases students' GPA, but also facilitates peer feedback on assignments and thoughtful student reflections on course content because of the ability for students to openly communicate with each other and develop strong relationships among peers (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Ebner, Leinhardt, Rohs, & Meyer, 2010; Kuh, 1993). Furthermore, using social media fosters long-term retention of information and develops a deeper understanding of content that is discussed in a class (Chen & Bryer, 2012; Heafner & Friedman, 2008). The research indicates that students who use social media are better able to connect course content with out-of-class peer interactions, ultimately supporting their learning within the classroom.

6. Academic collaboration and facebook usage^[4]

As digital natives, students in higher learning intensely use the social networking sites for academic collaboration (Hamid *et al.*, 2015), communicating and entertainment. Facebook, for example, has allowed students to get information about their learning community, perform collaborative learning, sharing their photo and knowledge (Hew, 2011) and submit their assignment. In addition, the use of social networking sites such as Facebook in higher learning have totally changed the role of students in their

learning and the way learning contents can be acquired. At present, students are greatly responsible to their own learning and most of the learning occurred throughout the close interactions among individual and individual as well as among individual and group.

Past studies have addressed that learning via Facebook have enormous potential to enhance teaching and learning in higher learning (Hamid *et al.*, 2015) which it can be used to foster collaborative learning and increase interactions between students. Irwin *et al* (2012) indicated that Facebook may be an appropriate addition to traditional e-learning tools. Social networking sites increased the rate and quality of collaboration for students. Collaborative learning is based on social learning theory, where learning takes place when learners interact among themselves. Thus, most of the collaborative learning activities are designed for group discussions using various communication tools to enhance student critical thinking, problem solving skills and self-reflection (Leow & Neo, 2015). By encouraging the use of social networking sites for academic collaboration, students might get positive effect on their academic achievement (Chawla *et al.*, 2015).

7. Student engagement^[5]

In 1984, Alexander Astin proposed a developmental theory for college students that focused on the concept of involvement, which he later renamed engagement. Astin defined engagement as 'the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience' (Astin 1984, p. 297).

Today, engagement is conceptualized as the time and effort students invest in educational activities that are empirically linked to desired college outcomes (Kuh 2009). Engagement encompasses various factors, including investment in the academic experience of college, interactions with faculty, involvement in co-curricular activities, and interaction with peers (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005; Kuh 2009). Kuh (2009) emphasizes two major facets: in-class (or academic) engagement and out-of-class engagement in educationally relevant (or co-curricular) activities, both of which are important to student success.

8. The positive impact of social networking in education^[6]

The influence of social networking has been illustrated by the use of three models (Cheung *et al.*, 2011). 'Subjective norm,' 'group norm,' and 'social identity' models have all shown the impact of social networking on peoples' behaviour. Cheung *et al.* (2001) conclude that people are influenced the most by a 'subjective norm.' In addition, Dholakia *et al.* (2004) also focus on group norms and social identity and identify the impact of them on organizing and managing the virtual communities and how the social networks influence different variables in decision making and participation.

The impact on students of perceiving the importance of social networks has changed their behaviour by engaging

³ Effects of Student Engagement with Social Media on Student Learning: A Review of Literature by Kristen Tarantino, Jessica McDonough and Ma Hua(2013)

⁴ The Impacts of Social Networking Sites in Higher Learning by Mohd Ishak Bin Ismail and Ruzaini Bin Abdullah Arshah; International Journal of Software Engineering & Computer Systems (IJSECS) ISSN: 2289-8522, Volume 2, pp. 114-119, February 2016

⁵ The effect of Twitter on college student engagement and grades by R. Junco, G. Heiberger & E. Loken

⁶ Adoption Of Social Networking In Education: A Study Of The Use Of Social Networks By Higher Education Students In Oman by Elham M. Al-Mukhaini, Wafa S. Al-Qayoudhi, and Oman Ali H. Al-Badi (2014); Journal of International Education Research – Second Quarter 2014 Volume 10, Number 2

with their everyday fascinations and obsessions (Scholz, 2009). E-learning has become a powerful tool in today's world and makes a strong impact on its users. It provides personalized, interactive learning and can also encourage self-motivation (Shim *et al.*, 2011). Nagy (2005) shows that this tool resulted in an increase in the demand for e-learning market (Nagy, 2005) which has become very important for many institutions and universities because it helps them to survive and to be successful (Elena Lidia Alexa, 2012).

Furthermore, there are ample opportunities to develop and improve the technology of the learning content. This attribute, together with the provision of privacy, content ownership, and opportunities, gives the user a positive view of the social networks (Siemens & Weller, 2011). The use of social networking tools has impacted positively through creating diversification between different categories of people and has supported them in both their personal and academic lives (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007).

There are four fundamental social software tools:

1. Connectivity and social rapport,
2. Collaborate information discovery,
3. Content reaction, and
4. Knowledge and information aggregation and content modification (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007).

These affordances have helped learners access their knowledge easily and share it anytime and anywhere. Social networks, such as e-learning technologies, provide an opportunity for educators to revise their content quickly and maintain control over it, learn the sequence pace of learning, time - and often media, which allows them to gain experience to meet their personal learning objectives (Bates, 2005). All the organizations need to do is develop their educational tools to give a high performance and to satisfy the educators by providing suitable websites, papers, classes, and group collaboration.

Here social networks play a very important role in providing knowledge equally for the users, especially students and teachers users (Klamma *et al.*, 2007). Klamma illustrated that one of the most important advantages of social networking is the ability to manage knowledge and learning by connecting with different experts and knowledgeable people in order to share common processes, activities, tools, concepts, etc. (Klamma *et al.*, 2007). There is an effective use of social software in learning and teaching which has resulted in having many benefits for the organization, such as staying in touch with the courses presented by the organization, attracting more external people, and keeping the conversation flowing.

Despite the fact that students and teachers can gain benefits from social software, they can also face challenges (Minocha, 2009). The extensive use of Web 2.0 tools has made changes in individuals' behaviour, specifically, and to society generally. Dean Groom identified Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism theories that are used to create the instructional environment. Moreover, the effective use of Web 2.0 was identified as a way to 'watch one, do one and teach one.' This means to find role models, to explore the information personally and, finally, to share your knowledge with other students and teachers.

Ologie (2013) presents four proven models for using SNs:

1. Build a community (by exchanging information),
2. Energize passionate people (to benefit from every tool and convert it to useful information),
3. Come up with a good idea (to share with others), and

4. Meet a need to make a connection (by searching for what satisfies you).

Social networking makes users more motivated to learn, especially in higher education. Students have the accessibility to create a public profile to share with different users (Fardoun *et al.*, 2012). A study by Cheung *et al.* (2011) demonstrates the reasons for using social networks, especially Facebook; namely, because of the effective connections made between people, and the easy way in which they exchange knowledge (Cheung *et al.*, 2011).

Another study carried out by Bostrom *et al.* (2008) describes some methods to help students and encourage them to work together to achieve shared learning outputs by understanding the concept of 'collaborative learning.' They find that the most successful method is the 'face-to-face' way of collaborative learning in small groups. Also, Microsoft Groove software was found to be the most successful application in peer-to-peer collaboration work (Bostrom *et al.*, 2008).

9. Social media in curricula and instruction ^[7]

The most popular way for new media to enter education is by bringing the skills most associated with them — attitude and competence — into the curricular repertoire of skills. The label *Media Education* has already been coined for the set of minimum skills that students require before getting full access to the media landscape. Media Education includes Netiquette (the ability to behave properly on the web, being polite to peer users) and safety (in terms of privacy, security, and avoiding being scammed or hacked). Another topic for Media Education is prevention against addiction to games. Media Education has been identified as a proper curricular host for introducing social media in schools.

Two rationales that challenge this approach are:

1. Social media – Blogging, Wikis, Facebook, Twitter, MSN, LinkedIn, Flickr, etc. — have been sufficiently explored by students in their private time. Additional instruction in the school is probably not needed at this point.
2. Social media are often used in a very inflexible way: students develop one-sided manners to communicate on the web, and are not effective or efficient in the long run. In other words: systematic instruction is needed to make youngsters more sophisticated in their use of social media. The balance between these two rationales needs to be made by teachers who are not very skilled users of social media yet. The best way to make progress in the future is to have experts and teachers identify a set of notions and sub skills that would allow teachers to roughly estimate their learners' mastery level and develop compensation programmes for them. This policy brief sketches a roadmap for the process of embracing social media in regular education. A practical recommendation for educators is to make a comprehensive list of rough estimations of students' mastery level and, based on it, suggest the elements that a programme for teachers should contain

10. Conclusion

Social media continues to transform pedagogy and can be used to support learning and teaching activities that were

⁷ UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education Social Media for Learning by Means of ICT

traditionally confined to classrooms. The use of social media in higher education presents many challenges but its importance cannot be ignored. Research has established that a majority of academics are of the perception that social media may be employed successfully in supporting the provision of student-centered learning approach. With the usage of social media, students no longer continue to remain passive absorbers of knowledge but become co-producers and contributors. In the current educational environment, learning has become more of a social process and the use of social media strengthens that process. The use of social media, like in many other areas, is here to stay in higher education settings too.

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