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Emerging contours of education in the matrix of social media

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Abstract

It becomes essential to blend real life and all-inclusive experience with theoretical knowledge in the age where a child is growing with ever-advancing information technology. Present educators are constantly endeavoring to bring the globe within the four walls of class-room using unconventional means offered by electronic media and ICT. The concept of hybrid learning is not a naïve concept, but it came into limelight after 1960 and it became popular in 2006 with publication of Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs - by Curtis J. Bonk and Charles R. Graham. Earlier means of mass communication were incorporated to expand the reign of education, but this gradual increasing tendency towards the use of technology to learn especially with the invent of search engines like Google, yahoo etc. a tension initiated between the teacher and the taught. The learners got bewildered to have an access to the oceans of information and they were indecisive to choose the relevant information. They were able to access a lot of fact and figures, but the same could not be transformed into knowledge in the absence of the instructor. Now teachers are upgrading themselves and using the fusion of convention and technology and social media is the latest tool to ameliorate the teaching-learning process. The purpose of this paper is to deliberate over the potential of social media when used with the formal structure of education.

Keywords: Emerging contours, matrix of social media

Introduction

Lucrative, yet deceptive dialogue- *khwaab kyu kuchal daale, pankh kyu kuter daale* --- IDEA..... “*I am from IIN... I am from IIN ...*” of Idea Internet Network strikes at the idea that online media is facilitating self-directed learning allowing the learners to gain knowledge and prepare to lead the life of their dreams and also hints at the non-traditional medium of learning- online media. Despite of being presenting quite misleading stories, the advertisements like that of Idea Internet Network are promoting the old proverb “where there is will, there is a way”.

Human development is an uninterrupted process of increasing positive knowledge, encouraging optimistic behavior, polishing their skills and making all people strong in a society. It's an output of multiple factors working together and the most important of all is quality education. It encompasses valued life outcomes for all aspects including health, happiness, well-being, life style, social and familial relations, employment and income etc. The aim of educationist is also same, therefore conventional methods of learning need to be mixed with information technology and other electronic media to the taught an all inclusive experience and to make learning effective. Moreover, each learner is distinct and teachers have been experimenting with myriad techniques and methods with different combination to get the desired levels of learning. Originally the concept of blended learning was used to denote the e-learning activities in conventional classroom. However, it can now refer to the amalgamation of online learning (e.g. MOOC); self-paced (Open university formats), live and collaborative learning; learning, practice and performance support

Great luminaries, be it Lord Ram or Rana Partaap, had also received education. Their skills and unique personality traits differentiated them from ordinary human beings. These days, social media has brought the ocean of knowledge in the palms of the generation of the day but, earlier to gain knowledge was a herculean task. The young greenhorns are learning how to speak, understand, read, and write with the help of YouTube, Face book, Twitter, and many applications available at Google play store in our mobile phones.

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Educators and curriculum developers have embraced multimedia and technology wholeheartedly. They consider it important to set the record straight, in the interest of the effective teaching and learning. They are continuously redesigning learning experiences in order to increase and deepen learning for all students. In traditional and formal educational institutions, social media is still considered as a commotion in the learning process. Reasons are quite obvious which range from possibilities of misuse/abuse of social media to distraction from the real goal. Some schools use official Face book pages to keep thousands of community members updated with current information on sports, cultural and academic activities to remain in the front row of quality educators.

The study is descriptive in nature. Both primary and secondary sources of data are used along personal observation of the changing paradigms of learning experience. Primary data incorporates personal observation of tools used by educators in the field of higher education. For secondary data, online and offline studies and journals of education and teaching methodology referred. Qualitative research techniques used for the analysis and interpretation of the data.

This paper has two objectives:

- I. To know how social media is entering in traditional classroom and in which form
- II. To understand the implications of incorporation of this new media in the field of education

What is Social Media?

Social media 'is about dialog – two way discussions bringing people together to discover and share information (Soils 2008). It embraces all activities that involve socializing individuals of a society via mobile applications like Whats App, Hike, We Chat, Viber, Skype and internet sites like Face book, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace etc. All of these allow denizens of this universe together to discover and share information (Soils, 2008) and to disseminate knowledge, experiences, and diverse perspectives to solve the complexities of life. The use of social media is escalating, with Facebook adding 16 million new users since January – that's roughly one new user every second.

Seaman, with Babson Survey Research Group, points to two main benefits of using social media in an online classroom: it fosters the sense of community among students and the ability to share information with each other. Studies in this field indicate that formal learning is only a small fraction of the lifelong experience of human learning. The influence of formal learning for life is about 19% in the first through twelfth grades, and the percentage is reduced to 8% in undergraduate years and 5% in graduate years. During higher education, informal learning becomes more effective in 2007. Thus, social media technologies, beyond the traditional classroom environment, have the potential to blur the line between formal and informal learning.

Researchers believe that learning is not possible in isolation as it "is not an individual acquisition activity, but a social discourse". Hence, social media has bridged the gaps amongst many people, to improve education quality at reduced cost with time efficiency. It has added value to and benefitted existing methods of online or distance education, if it used wisely with a systematic approach. The online social networks are increasingly being used not only by

college students, but also by instructors for different reasons.

Social Media and Education

The nature of social media implores the critical thinking, assimilation of information to solve problems, and communicating ideas effectively involving creativity and innovation to enrich the social experience. It can motivate and empower students to do their best work. It provides a public space to publish their works. The learning opportunities social media offer, hurdles still abound incorporating serious questions such as privacy, governance, and security.

Education is the work of the whole life. It begins from the time of birth, and continues till last moment of death.

~ Zakir Hussain

Our education system comprises three forms of education- formal, non-formal and informal. Where formal education is systematic, organized and presenting a rather rigid curriculum, non-formal education does not require student attendance or face to face contacts between students and teachers. Informal education does not necessarily include the objectives and subjects usually encompassed by the traditional curricula. It is for all. Zakir Hussain's vision of education is much associated to informal education, i.e., a life-long process. William Shakespeare' illustration of the real world as a mere stage and all of us as mere puppets with pre-assigned roles and King Bruce's lesson from a tiny speechless spider to fight back the lost battle are examples of informal learning. Smart phones addicted learners have opted for smarter learning tools and create unique race of the virtual learning networks without being an outsider in their own society.

Let's have a glance at some of the most popular social tools and networks and their use inside and outside classrooms.

1. Representative of Social-networking sites- Face book (FB)

Originally launched in 2004 for Harvard students, this site expanded to any university, then high school students, and now anyone over age 13 can join. Wikipedia defines Face book as "a social networking website... users can join networks organized by city, workplace, school and region. People can also add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves". Face book, popularly known as FB, allows the members to:

- Create profiles and regularly update their information
- Form an extensive Friends' network wherein they can post messages on the 'Wall'
- Upload pictures and videos; Comment on others' pictures
- Chat with their friends
- Become members of 'like' pages.

Classrooms have expanded beyond the structure of four walls. There are many public groups provide the opportunity for open discussions. Educational pages like UGC NET/JRF, Australian Centre for Education (ACE), IPS Academy, Indore and GKToday on FB keep its followers updated with ever exploding world of knowledge.

2. One of the most popular Mobile Applications- WhatsApp (WA)

WhatsApp messenger is a cross-platform working under smart phones that can provide instant messaging. WAJ (WhatsApp journalism) is helping students to develop their basic writing skills. The students reported their experiences through a survey after completion of the writing assignment. The results showed that the use of WhatsApp in the classroom increased students' motivation to write. (Allagui) Students are sharing their class-notes, create informal groups of the classmates and teachers vice versa the organizations find it easier to notify faculty as well as students about vital events and relevant.

3. One of the Leading Video Sites- YouTube

YouTube, founded in 2005, is the premier destination to watch the latest and greatest videos. One can easily find about 42,600 video clips when you type 'Indian universities' in the search box on YouTube page. Armstone's study says that YouTube has mainly three categories of education, namely- Primary and Secondary, University and Lifelong learning. Teachers post summaries of their in-class lectures, as well as instructional videos they think will help students. YouTube had 67.5 million unique visitors nationwide in the month of January 2008.

4. A personal space in the virtual world- Blogs

A blog is a personal website/webpage that contains content organized like a journal or a diary. Each entry is dated, and the entries are displayed on the web page in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent entry is posted at the top. Edublogs, blogger, Word Press are some popular blogs. There is provision for classroom blogs too. Using a blog makes learning independent of time and place. It gets students engaged, boosts their motivation promoting their communication skills and give time to students to reflect. Blogging fosters the learning bonds between teachers and students. It keeps parents updated about their kids' progress. It gives students ownership over their own learning and an authentic voice allowing them to articulate their needs and inform their learning. It contributes to identity-formation in students.

5. One Online Encyclopedia- Wikipedia

In early 2013, Steve Joordens, a professor at the University of Toronto, encouraged the 1,900 students enrolled in his introductory psychology course to add content to Wikipedia pages featuring content that related to the course. It can be easily incorporated with the course by Wikipedia assignments. It has been designed to be simple to use. Anyone can access and amend the information. It can be used by an online discussion group to develop a shared understanding of the concept. But, there is a problem as some of the articles have been uploaded by students and all information is not authentic.

There are some other sites which are influencing teaching learning process- Blackboard, Coursera, Twitter, MySpace, Skype, del.icio.us, Global Classroom, eduStyle etc. have given rise to information and knowledge.

Social Media as a tool to develop Students' Voices

Social media teaches students to communicate openly, honestly, and, above all, humanely with their classmates. Some students are quite shy and hesitate to engage in class

discussions or to show their emotions. Social tools help them to participate with their peers and get their voice heard. These provide them freedom without the risk of lagging behind. The things, they are unable to comprehend fully in the closed environment of classrooms, they can access the topics anywhere and at any time.

Challenges

In spite of all goodie things in social media, are not panacea to the existing challenges in delivering quality education, especially in developing countries. The next hitch is no access to internet and social networking sites in the rural and under-developed areas. Issues of access to infrastructure, electronic journals, research funds and libraries; suitable environment favorable for research, teaching and learning; and resources- constitute some of the challenges in higher education (Akoh, pp 17).

The id hackers and privacy issues have become the haunting raskshas. Facebook, My Space, Twitter and YouTube do not do any kinds of background checks on individuals wanting to create an account with school/college name. The absurdity of phenomenon is that the younger generation is either unaware of the dangers behind the desultory use of social networking sites or they ignore these to enjoy momentary pleasures of sharing their personal life.

Unwarranted the use of Social tools becomes an addiction and a distraction too. Social media has created so many forms of that those who follow blogs, Twitter, FB and others can easily find themselves overloaded with information.

Recommendations

In the end, it is recommend that since students are using social networks rigorously; the instructors should start in adopting willingly. Secondly, students' training and digital literacy are equally important. Teachers' should consider privacy and online security as they introduce policies while bringing in social media's use inside classroom. Accordingly, they should design learning outcomes, and develop curriculum. Such institutional changes can facilitate and indeed encourage experimentation by teachers, who wish to agree on the efficiency of social media tools for teaching. Scholarly research and individual experimentation are required to understand what and how things work, and in what circumstances. The instructors may include opportunities for controlled experimental research to test different tools and technologies and their efficacy in teaching and learning. This is an exciting time to be an educator; his/her task is to take advantage of opportunities without remaining frozen, given fears and concerns.

In the large picture of this world, the social networks have given a global platform to people—to connect and express. They have rewritten the laws of social communication and interaction; limitless expression, cross-border association, and free sharing of text, pictures and videos. They have empowered the educators and learners with social communities enriching the learning experience and quality learning again leads to empowerment.

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