

Importance of Social Media in Indian Higher Education System

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Abstract

Research has indicated that in recent years social media has penetrated almost all types of organizations. Higher education institutions have not been left behind too and have been adopters of this global phenomenon. Social media takes many forms such as social networking sites, blogs, vlogs, instant messaging and virtual communities. Having said that, the social networking site Facebook appears to clearly emerge as a winner predominantly because of its large number of members. Facebook allows its members to create and share content, build relationships and enable collaboration and connectivity irrespective of geographical location. The rapid rise of social media provides numerous possibilities for higher education institutions to adopt it to further their learning and teaching endeavors. The ubiquity and unusually high uptake of social media makes it suitable for administrators, managers, learners and teachers in higher education institutions too.

Key Words: Social Media, Higher Education, Learning, Teaching

Introduction

For learning and teaching, social media is used in a variety of different contexts - language learning, writing development, after-class discussion, synchronous and asynchronous communication, community building and curricular tool. The use of social media in higher education is changing the nature of the relationships of learners and teachers. Social media provides a unique stage for interaction amongst students and teachers and amongst students themselves. Through social media, students find it easy as well as convenient to communicate, access information, and to provide information. Studies have shown that in the recent years academics have been expanding their social media usage to offer after-hours support for students, deliver and host lectures, disseminate information and engage in discussion. The use of social media has also demonstrated increased teacher-student and student-student interaction. With social media, students also become adept at the use of online technologies in learning environments. Studies have indicated that the use of social media in higher education has enhanced learning, increased participation and engagement, improved content dissemination and improved pedagogy and information sharing.

Uses of Social Media in Connecting with Students

Formal learning is defined as a hierarchically structured educational system organized in sequential time periods, from nursery, primary, and high school to university, including academic studies, specialized training, as well as vocational and technical learning programs for all ages.

Informal learning is considered as the learning process by which each person learns and acquires attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills directly from his/her daily experience and social environment. This is also called learning based on interaction or lifelong learning

A great example of using social media to connect with students – admissions staff members and current students answer questions on the interview process via Google Hangout. Professors and educators can and should encourage their students to better communicate with one another for group projects, either by using Whatsapp groups or Google Hangouts.

Apart from the use of social media for learning and teaching, it is also being used for creating awareness and advertising. Social media enables educational institutions to provide stakeholders with information about new research programs, changes to policies, events, job vacancies, alumni engagement and institutional news. Some colleges and universities also use social media as a tool for recruiting students. Social media provides a perfect platform to highlight new courses, research and teaching staff and campus facilities in an attempt to attract more students.

In a university setting, social media is a valuable tool in terms of keeping staff members engaged and informed. They can use their Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram profiles to spread awareness about a particular news incident related to the university, broadcast important information, and share anecdotes or videos about the institution. Ultimately, social media plays an increasingly important role in higher education. It's a rapidly evolving field, so there's plenty of potential to integrate social media platforms and tools in student learning. For Professors it would be wise to adopt ways to incorporate these platforms into their coursework and student interactions, if they're not doing so already, to keep up with the ever-growing digital world and encourage 21st century learning.

Literature Review

Social media is an area of interest and research for many practitioners and researchers studying the influence of these media on different aspects of human life and activity (Merrill, 2011; Patino et al., 2012).

Although SM were originally intended to enhance social interactions they soon became a tool that was also used by firms, for example, to build brand loyalty, and by other institutions, such as universities, libraries, etc. **(Cassidy et al., 2011)**.

Due to their nature, SM can be successfully used for educational purposes because they are a set (group) of applications that are technically and ideologically based on the foundations of Web 2.0, which enable the creation and sharing of content among users **(Williams et al., 2012)**.

Moreover, although networking is treated as an informal method of communication and information gathering, informal learning can be an essential element in higher education **(Kassens-Noor, 2012)**.

Web 2.0 tools offer a new form of learning and teaching. In their opinion the research in this field should be further developed with the purpose of providing teachers with new solutions that can enrich their teaching techniques **(Hicks and Graber (2010)**

Research evidence shows that the most popular SM are the ones that connect people into networks of friends who share common characteristics, for example, Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn **(Duggan et al., 2015)**.

Thus, users can search for people that are able to provide particular information, help them to find it, or transfer knowledge to other people. **(Ray, 2014)**

Facebook, in particular, is a source that is easily accessible and also simple to use, and is often employed by students to ask questions about studies and to study interactively **(Benson et al., 2015)**

Highly popular media are also those that enable Internet users to express themselves on a specific topic in the form of the written word, oral expression, taking and collecting photos or recording videos, for example, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and also to use the information placed there by other users **(Hamid et al., 2015)**

Research Question

Q.What are the determinants of the use of SM for educational purposes?

Gender-Gender is often indicated as an important determinant differentiating the use of new ICTs. Recent evidence shows that Social Media are more often used by women than men. Women also spend more time using Social Media and have more friends on Social Media. Women use SM for educational purposes to a higher degree than men.

Age- A very large group of Social Media users belong to the generation of the so-called digital natives. Digital natives are people who prefer to receive information quickly by means of modern technological solutions and methods (ICTs). They also exhibit low tolerance for traditional methods of transmitting knowledge, for example, lectures The report by the Pew Research Center shows that 86% of Social Media users are undergraduate students.

Education level- Educational level is usually associated with people's age. Research evidence shows that undergraduate and graduates students are active users of Social Media , which are used both for academic purposes and for information searching in everyday life. The research shows that doctoral students prefer materials available in printed journals and e-journals rather than using SM.

Hypothesis

Based on the existing evidence the following hypothesis has been formulated:

Social Media are more often used for educational purposes by undergraduates and graduates (Bachelor and Master) than by schoolboys/girls or PhD.

Findings based on research

- 64.4 percent of faculty use social media for their personal lives, 33.8 percent use it for teaching.
- 41 percent for those under age 35 compared to 30 percent for those over age 55 reported using social media in their teaching.
- Faculty in the Humanities and Arts, Professions and Applied Sciences, and the Social Sciences use social media at higher rates than those in Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science.
- Blogs and wikis are preferred for teaching, while Facebook or LinkedIn are used more for social and professional connections.
- 88 percent of faculty, regardless of discipline, reported using online video in the classroom.

- Furthermore, from 160 researchers in philosophy and social studies at the University of Delhi, 71.25% stated that they were using Facebook during their research into collaborative learning processes.

Data Analysis based on Research

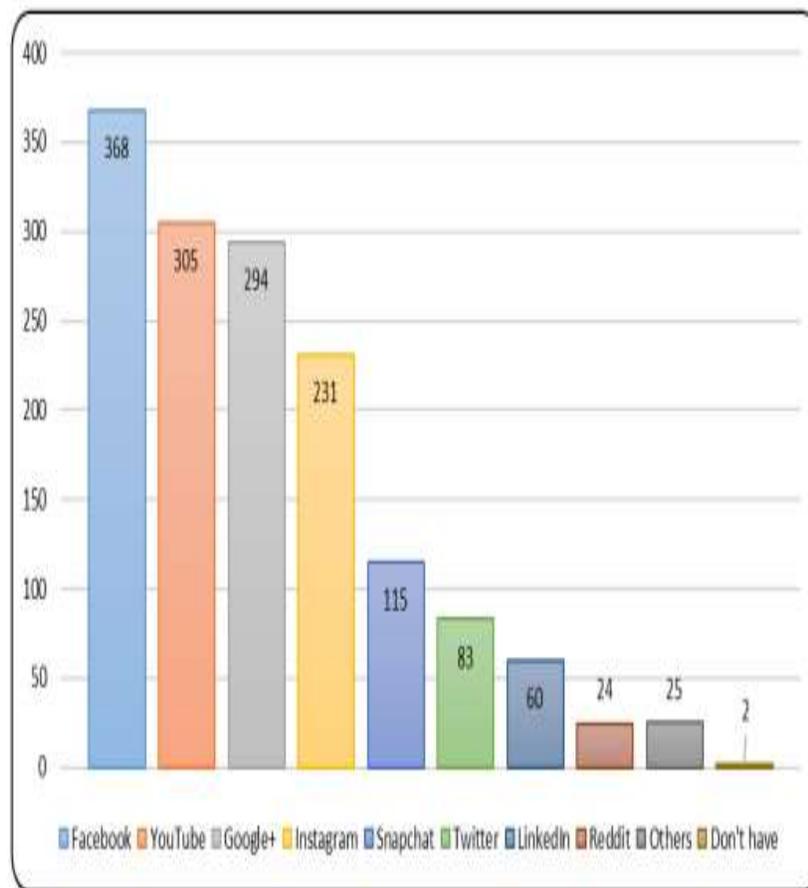


Figure 1. Number of respondents that have an account in social media

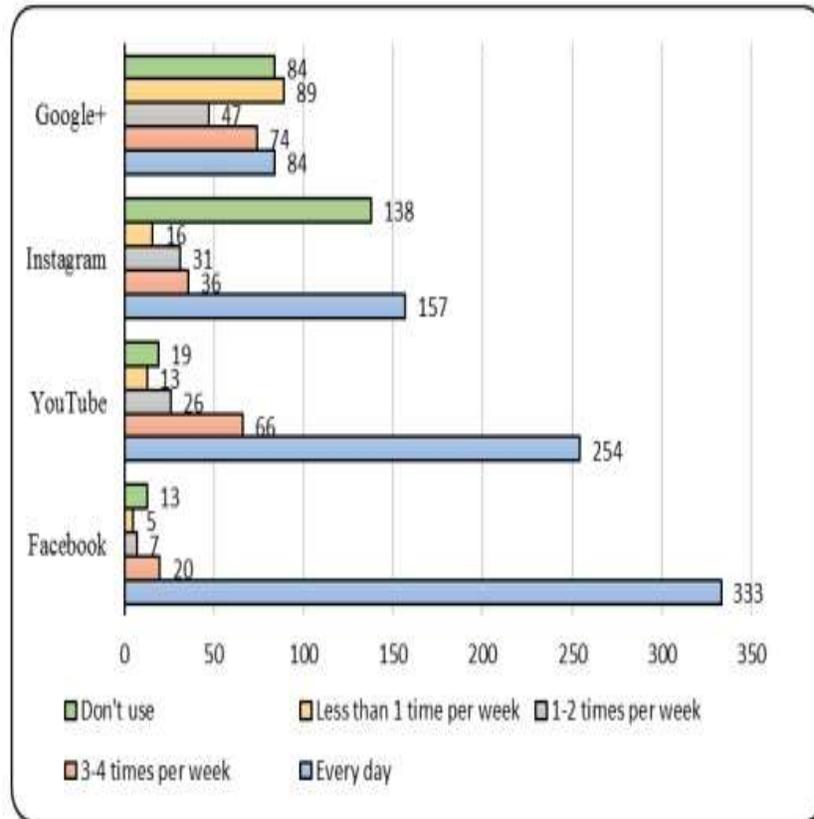


Figure 2. Frequency of use of four main social media.

Use of Social Media in Research

Social media is also great for [research](#), offering useful audience and subject monitoring tools. Students can use polls, surveys, or even just post a simple question to gauge how people feel about a particular topic. In a university setting, social media can be incredibly useful when it comes to reaching out and engaging with students. It's a less formal way for professors to communicate, showing students a more personal side while improving the teacher-student relationship. A study that analysed the use of social networks as a communication tool between teachers found that they primarily communicate through social networks for academic reasons. Results of the study led researchers to conclude that teachers should use social networks as communication tools for purely academic-related issues, such as addressing aspects related to class organization and coursework. Teacher-student interaction in the social media sphere should be kept strictly professional. The study also uncovered that teachers found Facebook and WhatsApp to be the most effective social media tools due to the popularity and versatility of Facebook, and the easy-to-use communicative abilities of WhatsApp.

Popular Social Networks and Higher Education Social media like Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram, and so on are used daily by millions of people worldwide, especially young people. According to in a sample consisting of 3000 students in India, 90% of them use Facebook, while 37% use Twitter as a communication tool. Another study in our country shows that about 71% of higher education students are Facebook users Facebook is possibly the most popular among the social networks for personal and educational purposes Moreover, students use online social network (OSN) platforms daily from 10 to 60 min on average, even when studying Furthermore, academic institutions make use of social networks for internal management of educational issues.

Limitations of Social Media

However, the use of social media in higher education is not without some inherent limitations. Its limitations include technological and privacy concerns, dominance of academics, passive behavior of students and absence of academic language usage. And to add to this list is the lack of awareness of the functionality offered by the social media platform. As everyone uses social media differently, academics need to be aware of the different approaches to the use of social media in formulating the integration of social media for their learning and teaching activities. The creation of Facebook groups is recommended to circumvent privacy concerns, encouragement to passive students is suggested and adequate training should be provided. Training and guidance should be delivered not just to students but to staff too.

Conclusion

In summary, social media continues to transform pedagogy and can be used to support learning and teaching activities that were 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. What needs to be worked out is how higher education institutions globally continue to embrace social media to their own benefit.

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