Use of Social Media in Formal Higher Education: Students' Perspective of Facebook as a Learning Tool

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ABSTRACT

In the modern era, social media such as Facebook can be used as a new technique of educational learning. Contemporary higher education students grew up surrounded by digital technologies and therefore have the expectation that technology should be a fundamental part of their learning process. However, technology merely offers an opportunity for these "digital native" students; how they choose to utilize this opportunity is a more complex decision as previous studies have raised concerns of distraction, abuse of use, and lack of strategic direction with usage in order to achieve meaningful learning. Consequently, the potential of introducing social media into formal learning in relation to the achievement of collaborative learning, social interaction, collective achievement and learning, student-centred learning, information sharing, and access to information through multiple resources might be short-changed if the argument against the integration of social media into learning is sustained and upheld. This paper proposes that Facebook can be establishes as a part of the students' real-life applications for what they learn in the classroom. Furthermore, this study aims to explore how teachers can use social media as formal learning tools.

1.0 Introduction

Social media plays a significant role in the student's personal lives and learning. Through different platforms, students learn to identify themselves in different domains and how to interact with others online. The 21st century saw the rapid advancement of ICT technologies in relation to social networking sites – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn; media sharing sites – Instagram, YouTube and Flickr as well as the internet enabled devices such as iPads, iPods, android and smartphones, et cetera which are part of everyday existence. Since the emergence of the internet, the social networking media have emerged as the most popular tools of communication and exchange of ideas among young adults and students of higher education institutions as they are willing to embrace and try new ideas; still evolving, social media has become an all-important tool in learning and teaching due to its flexibility, convenience, accessibility and popularity amongst young people. According to Deaton [1], social media can be used to improve learning, as well as encourage students to develop a critical mind-set about the technology pervading their world.

Academically, the social media have emerged as not only a tool for social interactions in schools and among students alone but also as a tool for supporting academic activities which enhance "interaction, collaboration, active participation, information and resource sharing and critical thinking" while also making learning fun and interesting [2]. Furthermore, Al-Rahmi & Zeki [3] views social media as a tool that plays a positive role in enhancing the performance of learners and encouraging active collective learning at the university level.

This study proposes that social media for example; Facebook might be establishes as a part of the students' real-life applications for what they learn in the classroom.

Students use social media to interact with their peers, and they may also use social media to search for terms or concepts taught in school, or use information learnt in the classroom to aid them in their interactions through online platforms. Therefore, this research aims to explore how we as teachers can use social media as formal learning tools. Today, the use of digital web technology has radically integrated into American culture. According to current reports of the Pew Internet Research Center that 95% Americans people aged 18-29, 89% of 30-49 years old Americans use the internet regularly [4]. When it became possible to obtain information all the time, then the learning environment goes beyond the classroom, this could enhance education delivery and management [5].

2.0 Related studies

The social media uses is part college and university students life now, only a few studies have observed how university authority plans learning activities through social media and that the authority supports such learning activities to maintain and use the intensity or benefits of social networks. Understanding an experienced faculty for using social networks in the university, it is important for developing the best practices for implementing social networks in the context of teaching and learning.

Evans [6] emphasizes that the use of Twitter has a positive effect on university-related activities, in particular, organizing the academic calendar and sharing information. In addition, the results of studies by Smith and Tirumala [7] showed that students using Twitter as an additional tool for communicating in the classroom felt more socially comfortable with their classmates, but there was no significant increase in academic achievement when compared to the control group.

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Conversely, Bannon [8] stated the results of a nationwide survey (n = 1997), which found that the use of social networks was increasing, especially at the university age (18-34). In the same way, the report by Duggan and Brenner [9] shows that 66.8% of Internet users aged 18–29 use social media sites with a higher percentage of Facebook users, followed by Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter (N = 1802). User Tumblr. ECAR's research on undergraduate studies and information technology have shown that students (N = 10000) want their teachers to use more educational tools, such as open educational resources (such as Open Course Ware and Consortium), social learning sites. (E.g. Cramster, CourseHero), visualization or acting training, learning management systems, email portfolios, online chat tools, online quote libraries, and e-UKS, which students think make a positive contribution to their learning for academic success [10].

3.0 Research Questions

The general question addressed in this study, In particular, the following issues need to be considered:
1. What training events are formed on social networks?
2. What strategies does the faculty have for developing Social media aided learning?
3. How do the faculty perceive the effectiveness of social networks as an educational tool?

4.0 Literature Review

Learning in the 21st century has undergone a tremendous revolution as the interest in higher education shifted from focusing on the need for long-term education in terms of skills [11] [3]. In this regard, the recent trend in higher education institutions has revealed a more widespread use of social media such that it has become imperative to evaluate its potential within educational practices. There are several social media platforms that cater to the need for group collaboration toward information sharing. Responding and tapping into this emerging trend and latent demand, social media emerged as both business and social as well as academic phenomena. Out of all the avalanche of social networks, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat have emerged as the most popular; Facebook has now the highest active monthly users reached 2.2 billion worldwide, while Twitter has 330 million monthly (active) users, while Instagram and Snapchat have 800 million and 187 million daily (active) users respectively [12].

4.1 Defining Social Media

Social media is a 21 century term used to outline various tools or methods that assess the social features in the Internet as a "channel for communication, collaboration, and creative expression" [2]. The term *social media platform* is defined as "web-based technology that enables the development, deployment and management of social media solutions and services" [13].

4.2 Social Media in Formal Learning

Contemporary students, especially at the higher education level collaborate, communicate and learn differently from their seniors owing to the ubiquity and their deep-seated dependence on technology, which makes them rely more on internet and social media [2]. Owing to this trend, it became clear that the role and potential of the social media need to be studied critically and scientifically in order to be able to maximize and channel its usage strategically.

Social media tools and technology have begun making a foray into the classroom, although [14] have argued that its use in teaching somewhat (lags) behind other uses, and that

teachers are more interested in using social networks in their personal lives than for professional or educational purposes. In addition, teachers often find it difficult to compartmentalize their personal lives from their professional lives.

Seaman & Tinti-Kane [14] argue that most teachers feel that digital communication has increased their level of communication with students while also pointing out that most teachers are concerned that the same technologies can be a distraction. As a social tool which has the propensity to manifest itself as an agent of socialization by virtue of its rich resources in contents, one of the critical areas of interest quickly emerged as education.

4.3 Social Media – Facebook as a Learning Tool in Higher Education Institutions

According to Al-Rahmi & Zeki [3] Social media can be described as the "channel through which knowledge is transmitted between communities and learners". This is evidenced in its use in institutions of higher education in ways that will boost cooperative education and encourage social interaction amongst learners. Facebook's potential as an additional tool for teaching and learning has been most popular and widely used as a tool to communicate and share ideas among university students [15].

Facebook is a typical sample of a social media platform that supports group communication, creating and sharing information and establishing communities. Although it generally functions as a social networking tool, Facebook has also gained a distinctive position as a learning tool for higher education [2].

Furthermore, diverse studies have established that social network tools have the utmost potential to "support educational activities by making interaction, collaboration, active participation, information and resource sharing and critical thinking possible" [2]. In fact, Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe [16] argued that Facebook facilitates students to develop campus-based social capital and social support networks that contribute to their integration into higher education life while enabling what McLoughlin & Lee [17] call new forms of community-based collaborative learning which has the potential to be of immeasurable value to students.

Arguably, the basis of the interaction is formed because all the group members share one common learning purpose which is channeled towards the establishment of communities for the creation and exchanging the contents with the same educational group which enables the forming of a dynamic sense of community [2].

In addition, while assessing the learning benefits of Facebook chat, where students are given free access to academics and even asked any questions related to learning on Facebook outside the classroom [15]. Interestingly, in the Finnish higher education level, the use of the social media is being integrated into different operational and administrative functions of institutions of higher education, including admissions, campus life, alumni relations, student union et cetera. While students in this educational context often embrace the use of one social media tool or the other to collaborate on tasks, projects, and assignments in and outside the institutions' environment.

5.0 Theoretical Framework
5.1 Learning theories

The general principles used in creating the learning environment are constructionism, cognition, and behavior.

However, these three principals were established at a time when technology did not affect the learning system [18].

5.2 The constructivist learning theory

The key element of constructivist learning is that students contribute significantly to critical analytical thinking in problem solving. At this point, students should remember that teaching is vital and core of academic supply. Downes [19] states that, the theory of teaching constructivism is a philosophy that promotes the logical and theoretical development of students.

Karagiorgi and Symeou [20] describe constructionism: From a constructionism perspective, the training center itself a learner. Additionally, they proved that, "learning cannot be equal because knowledge for constructivism cannot be transmitted perfectly from the minds of one person to another."

5.3 The Connectivism as a learning theory for the digital age

As technologies and connectivity evolve, learning activities begin to transfer learning principles and theories to a new digital age, and skills acquired through a relationship building typically enhance learning and achievement of experiences. The Theory of learning was developed by Siemens [18] and Downes [19] as a reference to digital age. The primary point of connectivism is an individual. Personal knowledge of an individual is stored in a network that feeds on organizations, companies, and networks and then expands learning opportunities. This process of expanding knowledge, from the individual to the network and then the organization, allows the higher to remain well in their field with their established connections [18].

6.0 Significant of the study

Recent decades, the social media such as Facebook become very popular and most welcomed social network platform. Now such platform is very familiar to the students in colleges and universities, and students are becoming increasingly dependent on social networks. So far, research on social networks and Facebook has largely led to significant social research and student performance on Facebook, the advantages or disadvantages of their use or the experience of students and teachers [21], [22], [23], [24].

However, continuous research is necessary to improve student to student interaction, as it will provide the opportunity to renew the enthusiasm that provides social interaction in the real world [25]. This uncertainty is the main motive of this study. Hence, it is necessary to develop more effective methods of applying social networks in the context of studying how the Facebook platform, in particular, supports the interaction of students for educational purposes. It is therefore imperative to critically study the pros and cons of the introduction and adoption of social media learning while exploring options for the strategic utilization of the social media for meaningful learning.

7.0 Conclusion

The adoption level of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. for academic goals have grown over the past decade, especially through informal channels such as group creation on Facebook and Facebook Messenger to complete group tasks. The considerable level of opportunities and challenges that trails the use of social media with regard to formal education have necessitated the need to strategically study the modalities for the integration of the social media alongside other pedagogical practices. Consequently, the aim of the study is to evaluate and communicate from the students' perspective, the potential relevance of the social media platform – Facebook to formal education through its incorporation beside regular academic practices.

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