An Empirical Study of using Social Media in Higher Education

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This Research Paper is a part of Innovation Project- DRC-307 which has been funded by Delhi University.

ABSTRACT:
Technology is what that makes a man’s life easy and allows him to perform a given task in fraction of seconds which was not possible earlier. Social media is also one of the gifts of technology. It is a platform through which people can share their opinions, views and ideas. Also social media has lot of influence on the education system as well. It can be used for improving the teaching and learning processes. It encourages collaborative learning, group studies and interaction. The aim of this project is to analyze how social media can be utilized for academic and educational purposes. For the same a survey is conducted at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC). This study involved surveying a sample of 100 students of IIMC to explore whether using social media for academic purposes enhances students’ learning or not. The results revealed that 82% students feel that social media enhanced their academic performance. Thus, there is a need to incorporate social media in the education system. The background of this research paper is very much in line with the vision of Digital India of the Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Digital Literacy Vision includes National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) also and this research paper is inspired by this mission.

KEYWORDS: Social media, Digital literacy, media clubs, NDLM

INTRODUCTION:
“We want to have one mission and target: Take the nation forward - Digitally and Economically”- Shri Narendra Modi

The digital India vision of the Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi includes making every citizen of India digitally empowered and providing him access to digital services. One of the central concerns under the digital India Mission is the National Digital literacy mission (NDLM) or Digital SakshartaAbhiyan (DISHA). As per NDLM, “Digital Literacy is the ability of individuals and communities to understand and use digital technologies for meaningful actions within life situations”. NDLM can succeed only if there is a shift away from the method of classroom teaching which mostly prevails in our country. A shift in the method of teaching is the need of the hour. Technology has the ability to allow the students of today to learn and gain knowledge from any source and social media is one of the gifts of technology.

According to Merriam-Webster (2014), social media is defined as “forms of electronic communications (as Websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as videos).”

Social media is a tool which strengthens the democracy and allows the people to vent out their feelings. Social media is the medium through which people are connected to each other. For staying connected distance is not an issue anymore. One can keep his/her closed ones updated about him/her. From business point of view, it can be said that social media helps in increasing brand awareness and helps in capturing audience easily. Also social media has lot of influence on the education system as well. It can be used for improving the teaching and learning processes. It encourages collaborative learning, group studies and interaction. It is widely agreed that more interaction between the students and teachers will lead to generation of more ideas and brain storming. It helps in clarifying of doubts and leads to conducting of doubt tutorials on the group itself. Today e-Books and online videos are very good source of learning. They prove to be so knowledgeable. The best part is that as per our convenience we can carry on with our studying. Social media helps in the
sharing of great ideas related to studies and education as well. It helps like-minded people to get together and plan their studying schedule. It provides so many videos, texts and audio materials which help in improvising and easing the teaching and learning processes. Social media leads to study session among like-minded people, hence more interactions and collaboration. Mutual discussions through social media increases the level of information and also the quality of information and thus resulting in improved quality of education more interaction through social media results in more competition to outperform others which further improves the level of knowledge. Higher level of knowledge and better quality of information improves the overall academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW:
Many current studies suggest that the high take up of social media applications as an addition to formal educational settings offers new opportunities for innovating and modernizing education institutions and for preparing learners for the 21st century. While social media’s start was for personal use, it has evolved to be used in virtually all domains. From a preliminary check, it appears that almost every college and university in the world has adopted some form of social media, using it for general outreach, to attract potential students, maintain alumni relations, and increase institutional reputation and pride. Some academic experts believe that social media can be used as an effective teaching tool in higher education because of its ease of use, ready availability, and individual affordability and network effects Tomai et al. (2010) found that students who used social media felt more emotionally connected to their peers because they felt as though they had people to talk to if they had a problem or if they needed help. Further, these peer connections encouraged participation by students who initially felt intimidated by in-class discussions (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Junco et al., 2011; Rambe, 2008)

Social network sites help fulfil communication needs and wants. It is a convenient method of communication and provides the ability to stay connected with friends and family, but on the users own rate and time (C Murray, 2008). Users can manage their interactions within their own schedule by choosing when they want to read and respond. The internet communication is a solitary activity usually done alone. However, it is efficient because it is a one-to-many method of communication which allows users to quickly spread information (H R Haverback, 2009)

There are many features of social media tools for the improvement of educational processes. Social media can be used in education processes for improving communication skills of students and teachers, expanding participation, empowering peer support, realization of collaborative learning. Social media also provides facilities which are enriching the learning and teaching processes with text, video, audio materials, supporting learning processes of students and supporting teachers’ teaching and evaluation processes (M. A. Urista, Q. Dong, and K. D. Day, 2009).

Nowadays, most researchers agree that knowledge not only exists in individual minds but also in the discourse and interactions between individuals. Such interactions support active participation, which is an essential element in student learning (Hrastinski, 2009). Learners need to develop skills to share knowledge and to learn with others, both in face-to-face situations and through technology including social media. Kabilan et al. (2010) found that students build learning communities by working collaboratively to construct knowledge. Social media serves as a tool to facilitate the development of these learning communities by encouraging collaboration and communication. Moreover, these interactions reinforce the achievement of desirable learning outcomes (Yu et al., 2010). As a result, social media supports collaborative learning, which in turn helps to strengthen the creative learning process (Shoshani & Rose Braun, 2007).

Collaborative learning is characterized by student interactions and connections with course content. Social media provides an opportunity for students to expand their learning environment since only a portion of student learning occurs within the confines of a classroom (Chen &Bryer, 2012; Friesen & Lowe, 2012; Wodzicki, Schwämmlein, &Moskaliuk, 2012). Fewkes and McCabe (2012) further argued that it is the responsibility of educators to find ways to incorporate current social media into their classrooms. Educators can use social media to develop creativity in their students by encouraging them to explore the content
material in new ways (Frye, Trathen, & Koppenhaver, 2010; Lamb & Johnson, 2010). For example, social media provides students with options for creating authentic, creative products through tools such as blogs, YouTube, and podcasts (Frye et al., 2010; Lamb & Johnson, 2010). Usage of social media helps in improving the academic performance of the students. It promotes the spreading of knowledge, encourages collaborative learning. Students who have similar approaches of studying the same wavelength can connect with one another and benefit and gain more out of collaboration. Creation of a Facebook Page for educational purposes leads to interaction among peers, interaction with teachers building of better student-teacher relations and more engagement (Waleed Mugahed Al-Rahmi and Mohd Shahizan Othman). Students can also use social media to search content material in order to develop new knowledge (Frye et al., 2010; Lamb & Johnson, 2010). By allowing the needs of creative learners to be met through a cooperative learning environment, students are better able to balance their individualism with the need for contact with others, allowing new ideas to flourish (Garrett, 2011; Shoshani & Rose Braun, 2007).

A survey of offline nature was conducted in the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) which has media clubs for academic purposes. IIMC is the Indian Institute for media education which is funded by the Government of India and is under the control of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. As a part of the survey there were also interactions with the students of IIMC to analyse how incorporating social media in education has benefitted them.

Some of the questions covered in the survey are as follows:

✔ For what purpose do the students use internet?
✔ Are they familiar with social networking sites?
✔ Which social networking site do they prefer?
✔ What is the main reason for joining the social networking sites?
✔ How often have they discuss course projects/ assignments with other students?
✔ How often have they prepared for exams by discussing course material with other students?
✔ How often have they contributed questions or contributed to course discussions?
✔ Do they feel that the media club in your institution has benefitted you from learning perspective?
✔ Do they expect to do well in studies?
✔ Do they come into contact with new people?
✔ On the whole are they satisfied with themselves?
✔ Are they satisfied with their level of intellectual development?
✔ Have they connected the new ideas with their prior knowledge?

OBSERVATIONS:

![Figure 1: Acquired skills through social media](image)
Figure 2: Frequency of visiting social networking websites

Figure 3: Social media’s impact on enhancement of learning
(Did social media enhance learning level?)

Figure 4: Discussion with Diverse groups with social media
65% of respondents feel that with social media their discussions with diverse groups have become better
The IIMC survey suggested that about 91% of the respondents visit social networking websites daily. Thus the frequency with which social media is used is very high. Due to Media Club, 100% of respondents have excellent interactions with other students and 95% have excellent interactions with faculty members. There were positive effects of social media on the quality of interactions of students with teachers and also of that of a student with other fellow mates. The interaction between students helps them in finding like-minded people, thus leading to creation of study groups. Quality of education also improves. Sharing of knowledge is always considered as an essential prerequisite to improve the knowledge and social media provides with more avenues to share knowledge. 69% of the students agree that they come into contact with new people and 76% believe that media clubs have helped them in getting info on job opportunities. Academic performance is always related to the level of involvement and hard work. Social media leads to involvement. About 83% respondents feel that Media Club has enhanced their learning. The survey had proved that the communication skills of the students had improved a lot. Media clubs have made them more informed and aware.
CONCLUSION:
This research paper sought to explore the use of social networking sites in higher education. Social media has made a big contribution towards achieving the goals of Digital India Campaign. It benefits not only the students but teachers as well. It encourages collaborative learning which leads to achievement of desirable outcome. Mutual discussions through social media increase the level of information and also the quality of information and thus resulting in improved quality of education. There is a move from rote learning which has been prevailing in India since ages towards creative learning and better understanding of subjects. It strengthens both peer interactions and student teacher interactions, based on the results we recommend that instructors must encourage the students on using social sites academically. Instructors should persuade freshman students to communicate with them using social sites if they are too shy to ask and get involved in the class. Our team also supports the idea of creating an online social group for elder students to share experience and help freshman students. We also propose that students can associate their accounts on social sites with Blackboard and can know more about their assignments by just accessing their accounts on social sites.

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