

Beyond the Classroom Walls: Role of Social Media in Information Transfer

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ABSTRACT

Teaching is the creative process of imparting knowledge and skills. Data and information are required to substantiate the teaching process and the effectiveness depends on the individual's creativity. The technological development in information sharing has created tremendous changes in education. The ability to search any specific information with less time, customized reproducibility of information, significant reduction in space requirement for carrying information and realistic audio visual form of information has grounded a strong foundation for modern education process. The arrival of social network sites which incorporate all above mentioned features has further simplified the teaching process. The present article deals with the role of social media in facilitating improved access to information.

Keywords: Blogs, Education, Facebook, Internet education, Online learning, Social media, Virtual classrooms

"Social media is redefining how we relate to each other as humans and how we as humans relate to the organizations that serve us. It is about dialog – two way discussions bringing people together to discover and share information" (Solis, 2008).

1. INTRODUCTION

As per the World Bank estimation, India still need to face the challenge of reaching some 8 million children who have not yet enrolled and it is also necessary to ensure the retention of all students till they complete their elementary education. (Nicholas, Watkinson, Rowlands, & Jubb, 2011). The study conducted by ASSOCHAM reveals that India stands sixth among the seven emerging economies of the world, in terms of education quality, with a score of 3.3 points, in terms of primary, secondary, tertiary and demographic parameters, on the other hand Russia has scored 7.3 points and topped the list, China stands second with 6.7 points, Brazil at third with 5.56 score points (Bernier, 2011). The result of this study portray the important issue that mere expansions of educational resources are not alone sufficient to solve

the crisis but at the same time parallel enhancement in the quality of education should be emphasized for the betterment of the society. This article deals with the role of social media in facilitating improved access to information, and how the social media address the major issues like inequalities in access to education, the delivery of cost effective and quality education, which are generally considered as major barrier for education in the developing nations. Since the definition of social media fences broad boundary the authors limits the references to popular services viz., Facebook, Google Doc. and YouTube.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND EDUCATION

In the age of network economy and information society, almost all social, cultural, and educational issues spread rapidly across local and global spheres. More than ever before people—particularly the young—are influenced by the advent of information technologies. However, the future of the world depends on a generation barely acquainted with critical and intellectual traditions. “The 21st century undergraduate university students rely heavily on the new media (e.g., social networking sites and virtual worlds) to communicate, and shape their worldviews” (Azadeh, 2011). “The social media is a trendy topic at the moment , having received much mass media and consumer attention for its widespread adoption during last decade” (Hrastinski & Dennen, 2012). Social media encompasses web-based and mobile technologies that are used in interactive dialogue through communication. Social media comprises of activities that involves making friends and interacting online. “Social media is redefining how we relate to each other as humans and how humans relate to organization that serves us. It is about the dialog – two way discussion bringing people together to discover and share information” (Solis, 2008). (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.". (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011) described the social media as, “Social Media is the media for social interaction as a superset beyond social communication enabled by ubiquitously accessible and scalable communication techniques, Social media has substantially changed the way organizations, communities, and individuals communicate”.

Figure 1 shows the graphical prism illustrating the wide variety of social media tools presently available for the new era of media education and literacy to plot online interactions amongst the people as well as the networks that connect the Social Web. (Solis, 2008)



Figure 1 Graphical prism illustrates the wide array of social media tools available for the new era of media education (Source: <http://www.briansolis.com/2008/08/introducing-conversation-prism/>)

2.1 Social networking sites and education

A social networking site (SNS) is an online service that aims at building and reflecting social networks or social relations among people, who, for example, share interests, opinions, knowledge and/or activities. A social network service consists of the individual's profile, their social links and a links to a variety of other services and sites of interest. SNS allow the users to exchange ideas, opinions, information, activities, events, and interests amongst the members of the community enrolled in it as a group. "Social media open up multiple options to add a new dimension to learning and knowledge processes. Particularly, social networking sites allow students to connect formal and informal learning settings" (Wodzicki, Schwämmlein, & Moskaliuk, 2012). (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2012) suggest that "SNS promotes knowledge sharing; thereby facilitate informal learning within the community". "SNS present opportunities for rapid dissemination of information from status updates, to tweets, to medical support groups and even clinical communication between patient providers" (Landman, Shelton, Kauffmann, & Dattilo). There are different types of

SNS available as mentioned in Figure 1; the most commonly used SNS are Facebook, My Space, and Twitter, flickr, blogs, You Tube and del.icio.us. “The Facebook is one of the most-trafficked sites in the world and has had to build infrastructure to support this rapid growth, Facebook have over 800 million active users”. (Facebook, 2012), “it has been very popular among the youth and the use of this website has been noticed in the academic field because there are various reason for the popularity” (Doğruer, Meneviş, & Eyyam, 2011). “Facebook has become a significant part of student’s life. Consequently , more and more university teachers embrace the idea that it can be used for many different things/purposes connected to (formal) education” (Grosbeck, Bran, & Tiru, 2011). (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010) carried out the survey amongst undergraduate students of University Sain Malaysia, Penang and found that students believe that Facebook could be utilized as an online environment in facilitating the learning of English. (Maranto & Barton, 2010) discussed the implication of brining SNS into classroom, comparing how students, teachers, and administrators use (and abuse) these space. (Mazman & Usluel, 2010) designed a structural model explaining how user could utilize Facebook for educational purpose, the study group consist of 6060 Facebook users and whose answer was examined by structural equation model. (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012) reviewed the literature on the factors contributing to Facebook use. (Nicki, 2012) observed the usage of social media by the University of Canterbury during the massive 7.1 magnitude earthquake and found that social media can support effectively in time of crisis for information sharing and communication. (Clements, de Vries, & Reinders, 2010) shared their experience using the popular game Farmville by Zynga® (a popular game within the social networking website Facebook) to teach the fundamentals of linear programming and integer programming concepts to undergraduate students in an introductory operations research course. (Hew, 2011) reviewed the available published research works that focus on the use of Facebook by the academics, and emphasized upon empirical findings.

2.2 Case Study: Suggestion for optimal usage of Social Media in Pondicherry University

The Pondicherry University campus is of 800 acres of land; the entire campus is beautified with green covers. The campus is completely Wi-Fi enabled, to facilitate the user to access the online computing and allied services at their convenience on 24x7 basis. The campus wide computer network internet links all building and therein the school/Department/Center/sections on main campus of University through optic fiber cable (OFC) backbone, high speed CISCO switches and routers. The internet access throughput is 64 Mbps (1:1) to all users on the campus through internet on 24 x 7 basis. This feature itself cinches the necessity of utilizing the resources to the optimum benefit. There are many ways the university can further increase the use of social networking sites.

2.2.1 Role of social Network sites in research activities:

Many universities suggest the students to post their research work to social network sites for public discussing, few universities made it as mandatory. Idea of posting the research work to public will help the researcher in many ways. This can be done in several stages. In the initial stage of the research, posting the objective or need of research in social network site will help as like brainstorming session. We can get many references from different domain; this will make the process simple, competent and more meaningful. The enormous amount of time spent on browsing the information will be saved. During the research the infrastructure for the analysis are always not necessarily available within the campus, in such cases the SNS helps in finding the infrastructure. Finally a scholar anybody finishes the research and is awaiting for commercialization, SNS like LinkedIn helps them in finding the corporate to commercialize their concept. The university should provide proper platform for all the activities by encouraging the faculty and researchers to make use of SNS. To prove the above facts the author had posted the question in Facebook and got the response from his own student and from another Professional friend within short duration As an illustration, Figure 2a shows the author requesting his friends to suggest him any apps, groups and other information regarding his research on “Role of sole media in education” (the present article) and in Figure 2b the author posted the whole content of the article in Facebook for review). This shows the possible potential of cross breed, transparent and effective research. Apart from research it also ensures the positive environment for learning and teaching, since the students suggesting information to their teacher. If our university students develop the culture of social networking in positive way, surely it would result in further effective research and learning process.



Figure 2a Facebook post which request suggestions



Figure 2b Facebook post requesting the review

2.2.2 Role of social network sites in advertisement

On exploring the other possibilities of SNS in university, the notice of tenders, celebration and usual circulars can be posted on SNS. There is a possibility of the question here, why we need to post these contents in SNS, since already PU post these content in PU website. The reasons are, reaching wide spectrum of users, clarity in information, feedback and reduced time consumption while answering the queries related to the notices. The users can subscribe to individual social network site and can get the updates from them frequently. Most of the time it is difficult to summarize all the information in the notice, in such occasion, SNS tracks all further discussion and comments, related to the notice, this helps both the user and advertiser.



Figure 3 Facebook home page of Pondicherry Engineering college



Figure 4 Facebook home page of Teri



Figure 5 Facebook home page of Pondicherry University

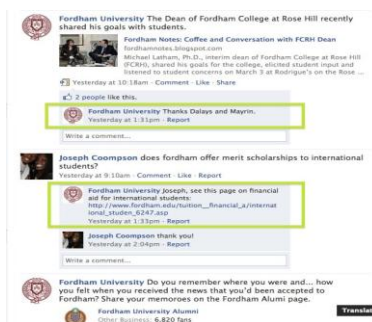


Figure 6 Fordham University Dean's message to his students in Facebook



Figure 7 Details of courses in Facebook

There are many universities which have made this as regular practice. Thankfully, Pondicherry University also started using Facebook (Figure 5). The Figure 4 shows the home page of TERI (The Energy Research Institute) and Figure 3 shows the home page of Pondicherry Engineering College affiliated to Pondicherry University.

2.2.3 Role of Social media in policy making and launching new courses

Almost all domains use the concept of SNS in all possible ways; the recent hit of the song “kolaveri” adduces the success of social network sites in launching new products. Nowadays corporate have much believe in SNS for developing, launching, follow ups and in almost all the stages of business, corporate accounts the feedback from SNS. This thought can be deployed for education also. Before introducing any new course or new policy, SNS helps the administration to find feedback from different users (Figure 6); this helps the policy maker in many ways. Sometimes they can also refer the response of similar policy or courses from other universities. The faculty members can also make use of SNS in framing the syllabus by discussing with various stake holders and thereby they can promptly advertise their coursework to the students (Figure 7). The students can also make use of SNS for finding the feedbacks for any specific courses. In addition by ensuring proper design, SNS can also be used for faculty evaluation, but enough care should be taken on sample size and various other parameters are to be considered before making any decision.

2.2.4 Role of social media in teaching process:

The social media ensures the active teacher student relationship beyond the class room. The teacher can share useful data, videos, blogs etc., related to the class work to their students (Figure 9a); this makes the students to learn the subject with good competent. Sometimes it helps both the teacher and student to keep the social discipline, since both of them are being monitored. SNS make the teaching learning process more transparent and allows the teacher to care much about the students both academically and non academically. The teacher can introduce new books and can share the uniqueness of the book to his students (Figure 9 b). Since the books are available in softcopy they can readily download it and read. Few students

concerned about their visibility to the teacher, would immediately respond to the post; by seeing these comments, other students would also continuing the loop to make them competitively available.



Figure 9a



Figure 9b

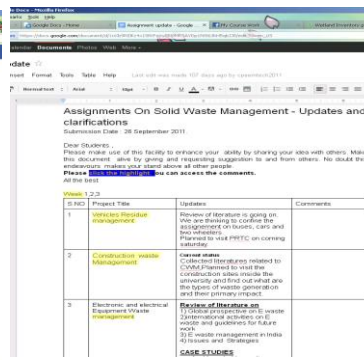


Figure 9c

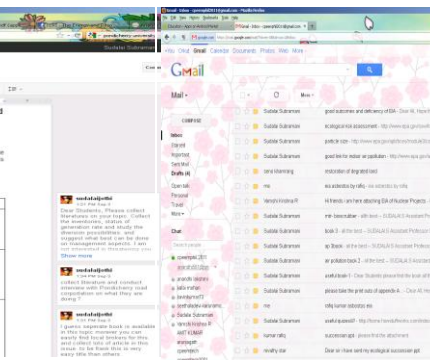


Figure 9d

Figure 9a Author shares the data in Facebook which he discussed in the class, Figure 9b Author introducing books to his students in Facebook, Figure 9c Author's follow up on Students assignments through Google doc., Figure 9d Authors mail to the common group mail of MPhil Scholars of CPEE, PU.

Few students use this custom to show them as disciplined active student to their friends especially to opposite gender. But it is all very healthy competition required for any development.

The teacher can prepare the slide and display it using several sites like slide share etc. By this provision the teacher can reach the large mass and need not confine to his own students only. The availability of course material makes teachers highly competent. The links of page can be posted in SNS site. The students can make use of these resources to prepare themselves before coming to the class. In case of absence, they can easily track the system. By posting the class discussion regularly in SNS helps the teacher, student, parents and management in many ways. For teachers it helps in reducing the burden of teaching since the discussion is open to the students round the clock. Students can prepare themselves well in advance and discuss it any time and track others comments also. Apart from social network sites Google documents also helps the university teachers in sharing documents to students or other faculty. Google docs help the teachers to follow up the assignments given to the students (Figure 9c). This custom ensures the responsibility of both students and teachers. All this documents can be used for recruitment process or any other auditing purpose.



Figure 10a Green erudite- Google site of MPhil scholars



Figure 10b Individual profile in the Google site



Figure 10c The details of assignment and seminars of an individual student available for download in the Google site

The author has encouraged his students to open a Google account, (mail, documents, you tube, Picasa, sites and others) and students have opened separate page for themselves in the Google site (Figure 9 d and Figure 10 a). The Google site was named as green Erudite. The assignments and presentations were loaded on the page and the complete profile of the students is available (Figure 10a, 10b, 10c). This helps the student in recruitment process and recollects all his class discussion and update the content also. This approach make the student enjoy what he does and improved his self esteem.

2.2.5 Role of social media in organizing events

The author belongs to Environment Engineering department which organize many activities targeting public awareness. Starting from invitation, gathering people in one place, transportation, and infrastructure like air conditioning etc., every time reaching the public to share the information consumes huge time and energy and leave significant ecological foot print. To mitigate the impacts the author made few endeavors, the invitation and message of the respective day was sent through SMS, Emails and Social network sites. To attract the mass, the author and his team made the lively.

Animated invitation with the help of free animation software Pencil, and free movie makers like Extra Normal and Go animate. The idea of audio enabled animated invitation attracted everyone. The finished movie was published in You Tube and the link was mailed to individuals.

The resource person was made to reach the mass with the help of Skype and further discussion was allowed through Gtalk. In few cases the voice message of the resource person was played and discussion was done through phone calls and Gtalk (Figure 11c, Figure 11e). In few other celebrations the organizing team reached the resource person's place and documented the message and finally displayed to the gathering. Further the videos were

planned to be published in YouTube and shared through social network sites. On organizing seminars and conference or wherever the collection of material and evaluation of the material is required from different users, the event management software like Easy chair can be involved; this reduces the complication and ensure transparency in all process.



Figure 11a



Figure 11b



Figure 11c



Figure 11d



Figure 11e

Figure 11a Awareness of plastics in Facebook **Figure 11b** Broad casting the students event (world population day organized by ICI) in Facebook, **Figure 11c** Courtesy of the resource person addressing through video to the students on renewable energy day 2011 organized by ICI, **Figure 11d** The post in Authors Facebook which shares the celebration of world water day organized by ICI with less eco footprints. **Figure 11e** Courtesy of the resource person addressing through video on World Environmental Day organized by ICI (Note: ICI Industry center Interface is the student forum of center for pollution control and environmental Engineering, Pondicherry University)

3. CONCLUSION

We at the beginning of the social media era (Laura, 2011), should understand the power of social media. While commercial organizations and various other domains have started using the benefit of social media to enhance their business activities, educators believe the use of social media in higher education is controversial and few are unaware of the potential of social media in education. Data predicts one in every thirteen people on Earth is connected with Facebook (Jeffbullas). So it is the responsibility for the educational society to make use of social media to facilitate new learning and to improve the access of education. The interest of this article is to highlight the importance of social media suggested by various authors and to share the experience of the author in using social media to gather and share information to his/her students, to showcasing the student’s work, to keep in touch with alumni, to enhance the recruitment process, to broadcast events and in emergency notification. According to Einstein “Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school” so let us begin the education beyond the classroom also.

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