

Social media in higher education: A study to explore Student perspective and experiences

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Abstract

The growth of social media in the last decade has transformed the way people live. In this digital era, social media leads a significant role in every sphere of life. People around the world generally used social media as a tool of communication, Information & Entertainment. These technological developments provoke higher education institutions to catch up with this world of social media applications and social media users. Thus Higher education institutions face notable technological changes in the 21st century. This yielded remarkable changes in the educational experience of learning amongst students that are addicted to traditional brick and mortar institutions and generally used social media technologies in their personal lives. So students have to rely on social media for learning also. This study is focus on the perspective of students regarding social media as a learning tool.

In the present study, the researcher explores the perspective of university students towards learning through social media. The researcher examined the social medium that is most valuable, popular, and frequently used by students for enhancing their educational experiences. The researcher finds out the advantages and limitations of using social media as a learning platform. A qualitative approach is employed in this study. Researchers use convenience sampling for the selection of universities. Through purposive sampling, the researcher selects the sample for focus group interview. This study illuminates that most popular and valuable social medium for higher learning is Youtube due to its distinct features. The advantage of using social media in higher education for students is its "easy access, less time consuming, interactive, and free of cost nature." While the negative impact of study on social media platforms shows that "distraction and privacy concern" is foremost

for males, "stress, irritation, lack of emotional support, and credibility of the content" is foremost for females.

Key words: social media, learning tool, higher Education, Students, India

Introduction

Over the last five years, the rise of social media has changed how the majority of internet users interact with it. The internet is no longer a one-way broadcast distribution system in which a single user gets data, information, and other resources from a small number of content providers. Instead of one-to-one connectivity, the internet is now driven by (and to some extent determined by) the activities of its ordinary users—a phenomenon known as many-to-many connectivity. As a result, the social web appears to be organized in a very different way from the cyberspace-era internet of the 1990s and 2000s, (Selwyn, 2012). Since the inception of the first social media networks, social media has evolved to provide people all over the world with new and important opportunities to interact (Nielsen, 2012 as cited in Wise et al, 2011). “The rapid adoption of social media & digital technologies has ensured increasing interest in using them for improving student engagement”, (Wise et al., 2011). This has been made possible by the development of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that provide a wide range of services and are, in some circumstances, free. The introduction of new devices to the market, including as smartphones and tablet PCs, as well as the development of web apps, coincides with the rise of new interactive experiences that are tailored to the needs of consumers, (Romero, 2014). As social media continues to grow at a rapid pace, it is increasingly becoming a part of our daily life. “Social networking is not only a worldwide phenomenon, but also a teaching and learning platform. The extent to which this significant expansion is being used for teaching and learning has yet to be determined,” (Alzouebi & Isakovic, 2019). Students nowadays rely heavily on social media to stay connected to their surroundings and the rest of the world, (Dahdal, 2020). Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Wikipedia, and Whatsapp are the most common and popular applications amongst students in higher education, (Alzouebi & Isakovic, 2019; Peruta & Sheilds, 2016; Romero, 2014). So this study aims to test the effectiveness of social media usage in higher learning. Here, researcher examine the social medium which is most valuable, popular, and frequently used by students for enhancing their educational experiences.

India and Internet

According to Statista.com in the year 2020, India had a total population of 749 million internet users. By 2040, this number is expected to rise to almost 1.5 billion users, showing that the south Asian country has a large market for internet services. Facebook remained the popular choice among the social media platforms as of 2020. India placed second only to China as the world's second largest online market in 2019. Both urban and rural areas are expected to see an increase in internet users, showing a dynamic increase in internet access. A majority of the country's internet users use their mobile phones to access the web. Leading factors that contributes to India's mobile-heavy internet access are the low cost of mobile data, the country's rising Smartphone user base, and the utility value of Smartphone vs.

computers and tablets, (Keelery, 2021). According to the IAMAI-Kantar ICUBE 2020 research, the number of active Internet users in India is predicted to rise by 45 percent in the next five years, reaching 900 million by 2025, up from roughly 622 million in 2020. An active user, according to the research, is someone who has used the Internet at least once in the previous month, (ETtech, 2021). A broad understanding of students' attitudes toward the use of social media in education may also be a first step toward determining the relationship between social media use and important educational outcomes like assessment and student engagement, (Neier & Zayer, 2016). This study examines how familiar students are with a variety of social media tools, not just the most popular ones mentioned in the media, such as Facebook and Twitter. This study is important for the policy makers and educational institutes as it will shed lights on the platforms that which medium is beneficial amongst students so that they must blend it with the traditional method of teaching and makes it more effective and fruitful for the younger generation.

Higher Education and social media

Higher education enrolment increased by 11.36 lakh to 3.85 crore in 2019-2020, up from 3.74 crore in 2018-2019. The study is the 10th in the department's annual All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) series. According to the data, 3.38 crore students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programmes. Nearly 85% of the students (2.85 crore) were enrolled in the six major fields of Humanities, Science, Commerce, Engineering and Technology, Medical Science, and Information Technology and Computer Science, (Sharma,2021). According to Hootsuite's data, 98 percent of higher education institutions share information on social media. The effectiveness of social media to raise enrolments is so great that 41% of university officials think they can link an increase in admissions to their university's social media activities. This demonstrates the power of social media platforms as 'brand awareness' tools, (Tattersfield, K, nd). People's lifestyles have shifted as a result of social networking. Every individual and institution in this digital era uses social media to disseminate information, awareness, expertise, and communication. This affects our higher education system as well. Almost every higher education institution used social media as a brand awareness tool to promote itself, but social media's significance is no longer restricted to this. It is quite important in the lives of students.

Results From Specific Social Media Sites:

A survey and interviews were conducted by Dhahdal (2020) with undergraduate university students in the United Arab Emirates, who were asked if using WhatsApp Groups within the structured framework of the course and as gradable requirements boosted their willingness to contribute to the course work. The findings show that students were more engaged with assignments that included WhatsApp as part of the structure. This study intends to examine the effectiveness of WhatsApp usage in a structured \sform via implementing tasks and

assignments that demand the students to participate with information and discussion on WhatsApp, (Dahdal, 2020).

According to Romero (2014) the term "social media" refers to a collection of Internet-based technological services that aid in improving interpersonal contact and collaboration among peers. These tools aid informal learning by facilitating the collection and management of information, as well as the provision of open spaces for discussion and conversation outside of the classroom. Users can connect to a network and use virtual learning communities to produce, edit, alter, and/or share content with others. Romero conducted a study in Mexico and South Korea which revealed that the primary goal of using social media in Mexico has been to give new ways of communication. Blogs have aided in the development of both technical and cognitive abilities. While in recent years, the use of Facebook promotes conversation, discussions and connection with others. In South Korea, social media is primarily used in the education department. The use of these instruments appears to be evenly distributed across men and women. The wiki was introduced in South Korea as a critical component in creating collaborative platforms for participation, primarily for issue solving and decision making, (Romero, 2014).

Wise, skeus & Williams (2011) investigated that the increased acceptance of social media, particularly when combined with the usage of portable digital devices such as cell phones and tablet computers, has piqued universities' interest in the extent to which social media might help improve student engagement. Facebook and Twitter (a microblogging and information dissemination site) have both been suggested as platforms for enhancing academic engagement with the digitally competent cohort of students, (Wise et al., 2011). This research claims that, rather than boosting social connection as a means of increasing academic engagement, Facebook appears to be more likely to act as a distracting effect. From an academic or institutional standpoint, Facebook, as a medium for social contact, has only a limited, if any; function to play in increasing student participation. As previously said, Twitter is designed to be more of an information-sharing tool than a social networking site. As a result, Twitter may have greater potential for increasing academic engagement, (Wise et al., 2011).

Bista (2015) claims as a new pedagogical tool, participants reported that Twitter provided space and opportunities to engage in academic activities. Participants said they used Twitter to get immediate and frequent course updates, ask mentor questions, update course assignments, and share useful information from outside the textbook with their fellow classmates and mentor. Twitter, as a new social media platform, has mostly been employed in college classes. Twitter may be used in an online classroom in a different way than it is in a traditional classroom. Participants agreed that Twitter encouraged active collaboration and student participation in their educational pursuits. Overall, participants in this study had a positive experience using Twitter, considered it as a useful tool to utilise in the classroom, and suggested it for future lectures with clear instructions and expectations. Although there are evident disagreements between educational discourse and the use of social media (e.g.,

Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn), the judicious and innovative use of social media can help students' educational interest and academic success, (Bista, 2015).

YouTube videos should serve as both an integral and supplemental component of the learning process. The use of YouTube videos is enjoyable for students. Students' grasp of academic subjects and performance improves as a result of these movies. Students take YouTube videos seriously as an instructional tool because they are taking notes and have an idea of how long the films should last in their heads. Students are so enthusiastic about using YouTube videos in the classroom that they believe it is a must, (Abbas & Qassim, 2020).

“In recent years, internet collaboration tools have become more widely available. Certain features of these tools foster their spread: they are simple to use, always available, allow information to be generated collectively and swiftly shared through social networks, and they are usually free. The use of blogs in the teaching of the Nutrition and Dietetics module has received generally excellent feedback. Blogging allows for the incorporation of a new tool into the educational process, which replicates the majority of the benefits identified in the literature,” (Conde-caballero et al., 2019).

Garcia, Moizer, Yacin & Wilkins (2019) put forward the use of blogs by students in the United Kingdom and the United States was investigated in this study. It has been demonstrated that the way students approach technology in teaching and learning in terms of pedagogical viewpoint, prior experience with blogs, and perceived utility of blogs all influence how they utilize blogs. Furthermore, the study found that increased use of blogs leads to higher levels of perceived learning among students in terms of reading, writing, and commenting. However, no evidence has been found to support the behavior of commenting out as a driver of student perceptions of learning , (Garcia et al., 2019).

In last few decades there has been significant rise in the adoption of social media in higher education as a learning tool. Despite these there are relatively few studies are available that explore the students perspective and experiences of using social media as a learning tool.

Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explore learner experiences & perspectives regarding the viability of using social media platforms as a learning tool in higher education in India. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Which social media platforms do learners consider as the most effective tool?
2. What are the advantages and limitations of using social media as a learning tool in higher education?

Methodology

The study was done in Gautam Buddha University – a state university in India. For focus group interview researcher first drop a message on whatsapp groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students. A focus group interview allows a relatively homogeneous group of people to discuss the interviewer's questions in a safe environment, (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). The goal of a Focus Group is to have the participants understand the topic of interest to the researcher, irrespective of its use, alone or together with other research methods. As discussed previously, FG may be considered as much a stand-alone research method as one used in conjunction with other methods, (Jenkins, 1998). Only Seven students out of 90 students were shown their interest to be a part of discussion. Otherwise researcher would go for the second focus group as well. Four females (3 graduation student and 1 post graduation student) and 3 males (all undergraduates) were part of the study. After the final confirmation of those who wants to be a part of focus group discussion, researcher meets them at university ground, makes them familiar with all the process and then allows them to come into the classroom. Both the researcher exchanges the role of facilitator and records & writes the discussion. The researcher transcribes the total discussion in 63 pages. The total time spend in this discussion is 90 minutes.

Result

Out of 7 respondents, 3 are males and 4 are females. All the respondents are using social media on average for more than six and half years. YouTube, Whatsapp, Twitter, Facebook, and blogs are the popular platform that they are using for learning purposes for the last 1-2 years, and they used it as a learning tool especially when they enter college before this platform was used for fun or enhancing their skills only. Females spent roughly 2 hours per week using social media for higher learning prior to the epidemic, but this increased to 4 hours per day following the pandemic. Males spent about one hour every week on social media for higher study, and after the pandemic, this increased to three hours per day. All the respondents agree that social media is an effective learning tool in the higher education system and consider youtube as the most significant tool for learning in higher education. However, only 2 male respondents subscribe to learning channels on youtube as they got notifications instantly.

How familiar you are with the concept of learning through social medium?

First female participant responded “Not too much familiar with the concept, Just know that we give and take notes. However I am aware with this phenomenon and using it as well”. Second female participant respond that “We can learn through social media by seeing a particular thing and then social media automatically show you related topic to your searches means I am sufficient familiar learning with the social media in higher education”. Third female respondent responded that she is often familiar with the concept of learning through social media and pandemic makes us more familiar than before. Fourth female respondent

(Postgraduation student) responded that she is familiar with this concept as used most of the platforms for learning. Male respondent said that “Good familiar with this concept because most of the study material is available on social media which can be easily learned and read.” Sixth male respondent responded that “learning through social medium is a concept in which there are two ends one is creator and second is learner. When we learn skills from creator this process is called or known as learning through social medium” and the last male respondent said that “I am using social media platforms and quite familiar with the concept of learning through the social media.” This data shows that male and female respondents are familiar with the concept of leaning through social media.

Which features you like the most in this medium/ platform?

First male answer that, “I like to watch learning videos on YouTube and read blogs on the social media, but youtube is the foremost interactive medium.” Second male responded that “through the social media platforms we can explore anything related to the study or it’s a very to use, but I like youtube most where I can find all my answers. Third male respondents responded that” social media platform are the places where you can easily find any study material like YouTube, Facebook. Female respondent responded that, “I like content sharing option and groups making feature where you can easily discuss any topic among the many people’s.” so blog is best but youtube provides a better audio- visual platform for learning. Second female respondent responded that, “I like the feature of YouTube channel, through this we easily get the information of latest video, but I don’t subscribe any channel for learning purpose”. Third female respondent responded that “Sharing latest information without delay, is the best feature of social medium I likes the most, prefer to watch videos as we grab what we see. I don’t find twitter and facebook as a tool in higher learning”. The last female responded that “different features of youtube like subscribe, sharing and downloading the videos option on youtube,I really like the most”. These data elaborated that every respondent like different feature of youtube.

What factors prompt you to use this particular medium for enhancing your learning?

Another question which was asked to the respondent is that what factors prompt you to use this particular medium for enhancing your learning. On this question first female respondent responded that, “The factors which prompt me to use this particular media or enhancing my learning are that it gives me the relevant content which I want and it gives an extra knowledge to me about the topic.” Second Female respondent responded that “Being ideal with these platforms enhanced our learning to use this medium.” Third female respondent responded that “These social media platforms of teaching strategies enhance our learning through these platforms.” Fourth female respondent responded that “Educational platforms give new information and study material especially YouTube and these also enhance our lifestyles”. Fifth male respondent responded that” Whenever I think of some good thing or have to get any kind of information, and I have a book at that time, so at such times we use social media and at any time we can get more and good information”. Sixth male respondent



responded that “As it is free of cost and many times it provides free features, secondly it is really hassle free we can just learn by sitting at homes, third one is that we can learn at any time we want to learn.” and last male respondent responded that “Whenever I saw the educational content video and particular topic videos on social media platforms I liked their way of teaching, these factors prompt me to use these particular platform’s.” All respondent used social media for academic purpose and various factors of these social media platforms prompt them to use particular social media platforms for their learning purpose.

Will you ever recommend this medium/ Platform to your friends that this is best for learning? How you convince them?

This question was good enough for the respondent that if you are using social media platform for learning purpose will you recommended these platforms to your friends and circle. First female respondent responded that “Yes, I recommend the youtube to my friends that this is the best for learning because it has all the things which are useful for a person and helped us lot while understanding the concepts.” Second female respondent responded that “ Yes, I also recommend to my friends and When it is about learning everyone wants to learn more and social media is one of the platforms through which we can learn without paying as well. So it is easy to convenience”. Third female respondent responded that “she will never recommend social media platforms for leaning purpose to their friends.” Fourth female respondent said that “Absolutely, whenever our friends have to give any information rearding any topic and link of any youtube channel we used whatsapp, and then discuss on it as well.” Fifth male respondent responded that “I’ll recommend YouTube and Facebook for their easy and best learning. As they are free to sources and it provides huge collections/ variety of skills, abilities, etc” and last male respondent responded that “Yes, I’ll convince them by telling how easy the concept and access of the educational content is very convenient”. Out of seven respondent only single female candidates said that she will never recommend these platforms to their friend while six said that they recommend these platforms to their friends for learning purpose.

According to you what are the advantage of using social media as a learning tool?

On this question respondents give their views according to their knowledge of the social media platforms. According to first female respondent view on the positive impact/ advantages of using social media as a learning tool is that, “It gives you the information which you want, we can also clear their doubts through the YouTube videos and can also follow what we like on these platforms” and second female respondent responded that “ according to my thoughts at the same time of learning if we are not aware of any word or don’t know meaning of the word we can search meaning of word on YouTube and also find related content on social media platforms”. Third female respondent responded that “Easy to understand the provided content by the social media platforms and get all the information in very less time”. Fourth female respondents responded that “Without any cost we can get information, aware people, and entertainment and get less time to interact each other. “ Fifth

male respondent responded that “There are absolutely many advantages from which you know a lot. Whenever a thought comes in the mind or has to understand anything, then there is only one option, Social media, under which the right information can be found and a lot can be learned through social media.” Sixth male respondent responded that “. People who want to learn but due to health issues or monetary issues they can't join physical institutions they can just learn anything by sitting at their homes is the one best advantage I think so” and last female respondent responded that “Most important we can get easy access of the content at any time or anyplace is the most positive factor of the social media as a learning platform”. Overall examination of advantages of social media in higher learning shows that “ easy access , less time consuming, interactive, and free of cost are the most recurrent positive aspect.

Any negative impact or disadvantage of social media as a learning tool?

Last question was based on the negative impact of the social media while using it as a learning tool. First female respondent said that “first one is sometime the Credibility of the content and second one it gives lack of emotional connection”. Second female respondent responded that “ she think that during the learning time pop-up messages of the social media platforms can disturb concentration in learning from social media” and third female respondent said that, “ sometimes we also get wrong information from it and lack of emotional support, sleeping disturbance, irritation, stress are common while sitting for a long on these sites”. Fourth female respondent responded that “credibility of the content is the major issue of the social media platforms because everyone has the opportunity to upload anything else on these platforms and ofcourse irritation in eyes, body pain, mood changes are too normal due to long time spent in study these days.” The male candidate responded that “advantage and disadvantages of Social media can be seen from two angles. For me it is just distraction as while searching for a concept, topic chances may increase that we switch to other content. Sixth male respondent responded that “People get distracted from their main goal of life and get addicted to social media mainly they try to visit inappropriate pages and they get addicted to it like adult contents” and last male respondent responded that “ cyber bullying and privacy is the negative outcome of the social media”. After analysis the views of the respondents on the negative impact of the social media platforms it shows that for male it is “distraction and privacy concern” is foremost while for females it is “stress, irritation, lack of emotional support and credibility of the content”.

Share your any social media educational experience.

First female respondent share that “I did a online internship through the online medium with the page of UBF organization it was a great experience working with lot of people from other states, it's a new kind of experience for me and also got many idea after that. As a learning tool it plays a significant role in my study as it grooms me also” and second female respondent responded that “It was a great experience to attend Facebook live sessions of the prominent professors which I attended on the various educational topics during the corona

pandemic.” Third female responded that “whenever I had doubts related to my topic I always clear the concept through the watching videos on the YouTube and I also get the help of my seniors which are on my Facebook.” Fourth female candidate responded that, “during the corona pandemic I created the Whats app group for the study purpose and added my friends. In this group people share their doubts.” Fifth male respondent responded that, “YouTube channels help me lot to know about concepts which are not cleared or I feel doubted. Sixth male candidate responded that “I got my internship letter from social media (LinkedIn) and this was great experience of my life.” and last male candidate responded that “There was lot of things which I was not able to understand during lecture and also hesitates to ask teachers but social media provides all the necessary content and it become easy to come over all the doubts”.

Discussion

The study revealed that the most popular and valuable social medium for higher learning is youtube due to its distinct features. Social media motivates students to interact with each other, exchange and respect each other point of views. It eases communication and improves the relationships that sustain effective learning. The study revealed that the advantage of using social media in higher education as per students is its “easy access, less time consuming, interactive, and free of cost nature are the most recurrent positive aspect. While the negative impact of study on social media platforms shows that for male it is “distraction and privacy concern” is foremost while for females it is “stress, irritation, lack of emotional support and credibility of the content. Out of 7 respondents, 4 are females and 3 are males. Female’s respondent shared that apart from learning it helps in grooming also. The live session on facebook helps to understand various topics. For clearing doubts youtube is the best ever platform.and for discussion whatsapp is the best platform. When utilised in conjunction with the need of a course participation grade, WhatsApp has shown to be a useful tool for students to increase active learning. “WhatsApp is a simple software to download and use, making it a popular way for students to communicate with their teachers and peers,” (Dahdal, 2020). For male respondents also youtube is best for clearing doubts.

Conclusion

The focus of this research is to learn about learners' experiences and perspectives on social media, which is used as a learning tool by students in higher education. This focus group discussion demonstrates that combining social media platforms with traditional teaching methods will result in a better learning process for students. In India, YouTube is the most popular and important social media platform for learning. “Teachers can't afford to keep YouTube out of the classroom because it provides all of the benefits of a more beneficial and entertaining teaching experience. YouTube videos should serve as both an inherent and complementary component of the learning process. YouTube videos are enjoyable for students to watch. These types of films help pupils understand academic content and enhance their grades”, (Abbas & Qassim, 2020).The interactive characteristics of social media help

students have a better comprehension of subjects and improve their learning process. We feel that the findings of this study open up promising options for future research, particularly in terms of gaining a better knowledge of how social media platforms may help students in India and worldwide learn more effectively.

Limitations of the Study

Due to time constraint participant sample was small; more focus group discussions particularly with students from different other universities as well as from different geographical locations is required to generate adequate data.

Recommendations for Future Research

A closer examination is needed to explore the experiences of learners in India as the number of students enrolled in higher education is increasing. This research can help the institutes of higher learning to focus on blended learning as social media is increasing in urban and rural areas of India as well.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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