



SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION: BANE OR BOON

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Abstract

After the prolonged period of more or less rigid and static pedagogical realm which comprised fixed knowledge, fixed methods of teaching and fixed ingredients (teacher and students), social media broke into it to make it more dynamic, flexible and learner-centred. Like any other technology, social media is also a double-edged sword with all its helps and hazards. This research paper discusses the opportunities offered by the inclusion of social media in education, and also its pros and cons. Present paper reflects that social media facilitates easy creation and phenomenal sharing of enriched and enhanced learning experiences and also enables a personalised learning experience suitable for learners with different styles of learning and sharing it across time and space. It also raises issues related to social media such as low reliability of content, privacy concerns, distractions and peer pressure which need to be addressed to make its use more fruitful.

Keyword: Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Just imagine the situation in which children were given education in ancient times. Small kids were sent to Gurukuls only to come back after attaining the age of 25. They were taught under strict discipline without much variation in the interaction system between the teacher and disciples. Fixed knowledge was conveyed through fixed methods regardless of individual differences. Now, just have a look at the changing scenario facilitated by internet, social media and on-line courses:

On 14th March 2013, Amol got the news that he had been accepted to MIT after scoring 97% on MIT's MOOC (www.edx.org) on circuits and electronics. Online courses such as MOOC (Massive open online course), or an open educational resource like Academic Earth have the potential to open many new doors as in case of Amol Bhave, a 17 year old student from Jabalpur discovered (**Pant,2013**). Even for non-formal learning like cultivating a hobby, new media offers a plethora of learning resources in multiple formats to suit different types of learners. Enthusiasts belonging to different fields, share their knowledge along with best practices and tips on YouTube, Slideshare and Twitter. Experts curate learning resources in their area of proficiency and make them available on websites like Pinterest, ScoopIt and Learnist. Many teachers worldwide are sharing free tutorials on Udemy and WizIQ. Most of these savants are even willing to engage in a dialogue on a discussion forum; Facebook or Google group to help solve specific issues their followers raise. Some are even eager to form informal online learning communities. Thus, the use of social media has changed the teaching- learning scenario in a tremendous way.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has been defined as a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. *Ghose and Thakurta (2013) observed "Furthermore social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organisations, communities and individuals."* **Bryer and Zavatarro (2011)** observed: *"Social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders. These technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds."* These contrast with media tools that have social features, but which may not connect individuals or groups through the Internet.

SOME OF THE IMPORTANT SOCIAL MEDIA

SITES:

FACEBOOK	• online social networking service
TWITTER	• Micro-blogging system
LinkedIn	• business and professional networking site
YouTube	• video sharing website
Google+	• latest social network
SlideShare	• slide hosting service
Pinterest	• social network with virtual pinboard
Udemy	• Online learning platform

Facebook: It is an online social networking service. Its name stems from the colloquial name for the book given to the students at the start of the academic year by some university administrations to help students get to know each other. Facebook was founded by **Mark Zuckerberg** in February 2004 with his college roommates and fellow Harvard students. Initially its membership was limited but now it allows any user who declares him/herself to be at least 13 years old to become registered users of the site. After which they may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, exchange messages, and receive automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organised by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics, and characterise their friends into lists such as “people from work” or “close friends”. As of September 2012, Facebook has over one billion active users (of which 8.7% are fake).

Twitter: Twitter was created by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz stone and noah Glass in March 2006 and was launched in July 2006. It is an online social networking and micro-blogging system, which allows us to compose short messages of 140 characters that are

known as “tweets”. Registered users can read and post tweets but unregistered users can only read them. Twitter uses hashtags in order to reach a larger audience.

LinkedIn: This is business and professional networking. Besides allowing you to publish your CV, LinkedIn allows users to join groups, use applications, post your business references, and search for any type of business contact. This social network helps many HR officers and head hunters search a large pool of potential employees.

YouTube: It is a video-sharing website, created by three former PayPal employees in February 2005, where one can view, share, upload, comment on, like or dislike videos. It uses Adobe Flash Video and HTML5 technology to display a wide variety of user-generated video-content, including movie clips, t.v. clips, music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging, short original videos and educational videos.

Google+: Google+ is one of the newest social networks. The server presents itself as a service that can help you stay in touch with your friends and acquaintances and discover new and interesting people. Once registered on Google+, one can fill in his personal information, upload profile picture, add photo albums from Google Picasa web albums and connect his Google+ profile with Twitter profile and much more.

SlideShare: it is a web 2.0 based slide hosting service. Users can upload files privately or publicly in powerpoint, PDF, Keynote, or OpenDocument Presentations formats. Slide decks can be viewed on the site itself. Launched on October 4, 2006, the website is considered similar to YouTube, but for slideshows.

Pinterest: It is very unique social network. On Pinterest, we have virtual pinboard, where we can create, manage and share image collections that are related to a particular topic- hobbies, interests, households, etc. the site was founded by Ben Silbermann, Paul Sciarra, and Evan Sharp and launched in March 2010. Pinterest is similar to earlier social image bookmarking systems. It allows users to save images and categorize them on different boards. They can follow other users’ boards if they have similar tastes.

Udemy: It is an online learning platform (website) that allows instructors to host courses. It was launched by Eren Bali, Oktay Caglar, and Gagan Biyani in 2010. Udemy serves as an online platform that allows instructors to build online courses on the topics of their choice. Using Udemy’s content platform, they can upload video, powerpoint presentations, PDFs,

audio, zip files and live classes to create courses. Instructors are allowed to engage and interact with users via online discussion boards. It offers both paid and free courses in various categories such as; language, music, technology, health and fitness, business and entrepreneurship, academics and the arts.

Social media has been hailed as delivering the promise of new, socially engaged educational experiences for students in undergraduate, self-directed, and other educational sectors. Though, it is perceived differently by different people in different walks of life. It can be used as a serious growth tool and also may cause a hindrance to growth by acting as a source of distraction.

A theoretical and historical analysis of these media in the light of other media transformations, however, helps to situate and qualify this promise. **Castro (2012)** observed, *“learning and teaching art through social media has been described as a form of participatory culture, to better understand the reciprocal dynamics of learning and teaching. Learning arts through social media can be characterised as encounters with difference, both in ideas and contexts. Subsequently, the dynamics of attention shifts and distributes across collectives. From this, a conceptualisation of art teacher can be inferred as an identity that is not fixed but one that shifts throughout social media.”*

SOME OF THE IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS:

As social media is becoming increasingly ubiquitous to millennium learners, educators see the potential benefits of using these tools for academic purposes (Hughes, 2009; Nellison, 2007). Unfortunately, there is limited research on how social media impacts students and, in particular, how it influences students' learning experience (Hew, 2011; Mix, 2010). Especially In India, there is dearth of research work on the issues related to social media. One of the common themes in earlier researches is that students use social media for personal reasons, but rarely for educational or learning purposes (Hew, 2011). Based on the 2009 and 2010 data from the EDUCAUSE Centre for Applied Research (Caruso, Smith, & Salaway, 2009; Smith & Borreson, 2010), over 90% of students responded that they used social networking services, such as Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, and LinkedIn. However, less than 30% of the participants reported using them in a course during the quarter or semester of the annual surveys. Uses of other social media sites, such as video sharing, blogs and wikis, follow the same pattern. EDUCAUSE (Smith & Borreson, 2010) reported that only about

30% of their surveyed students used web-based word processor, spreadsheet, presentation, and wiki tools in courses. Even fewer students reported using technologies, such as video/photo-sharing sites, calendars, citation tools, blogs, social bookmarking tools, and online virtual worlds for classes. The limited education-related activities on social media platforms include creating study groups and other interactions with classmates without the knowledge of the instructor, “post-hoc” critiquing of learning experiences and events, reading web resources with little evidence of critical inquiry or analytical awareness, and file sharing, gaming, and brief communicating (Selwyn, 2009).

The use of social media in teaching by instructors is even scarcer. The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE, 2010) surveyed 4,600 faculty members from 50 U.S. colleges and universities and found that over 80% of the surveyed faculty did not know or never used social media technologies such as blogs, wikis, Google docs, video conferencing, video games, or virtual worlds. The national survey findings (2010) suggested that most instructors continue to teach using traditional lecture-based instruction. Empirical research is lacking in terms of what strategies instructors used for teaching with social media. Despite the limited usage of social media in the academic world, research has supported connectivism theory and found benefits in using social media by instructors if the technology is adopted for teaching (Mazer et al., 2007; 2009). Mazer et al. examined the effects of an instructor’s self-disclosure via Facebook on her credibility as perceived by undergraduate students. Results showed that students tend to attribute higher perceived levels of instructor credibility to an instructor who willingly disclosed more information on Facebook than one who did not. More research needs to be conducted on instructor presence and social media strategies.

The literature identified concerns for using social media as a teaching and learning tool, such as its negative effects on academic performance. One study addressed the relationship between social media usage and academic performance (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). The researchers surveyed 219 university students and found that Facebook users had significantly lower GPAs compared to non-users. This study did not infer a direct causal relationship and asked researchers to conduct further research on the impacts of social media on academic performance. The question is, if more instructors could facilitate social media activities based on the connectivist pedagogy to alter how the technologies are used, could social media be a beneficial learning tool? The gap between the theory and the lack of research to support students’ networked learning indicates that researchers should consider how students and

instructors can be encouraged to use these technologies and how to infuse social practices into learning activities using sound pedagogical practices.

There are discussions in the literature around the ethical issues of using social media in academic environments. Students' privacy and security issues are the primary concern (Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp, & Carter, 2009). However, a class discussion on social media might reveal students' identification to the public. Moreover, some students are not aware that their posted information on social media is publicly available. A piece of personal information or a picture on the Web might lead to issues of identity theft or prevent them from future career opportunities. These concerns are deepening with the ever increasing number of social media users as indicated by following figures:

According to the internet and mobile association of India (IAMAI) report, the number of social media users in urban India reached 62 million by December 2012. Nearly three out of four (74%) of all active internet users in urban India use social media. In fact, social networking is considered the main internet activity done on mobile phone which is mentioned by exactly one third (33%) of all respondents, whereas 32% mentioned for e-mail.

Indians spend an average of approximately 30 minutes everyday on social media. Of these users, the maximum users are young men (84%) and college going students (82%). However, without internet access, social networking would not have a leg to stand on, were it not for the amazing growth of mobile telephony in the country. By June 2012, there were more than 900 million subscriber identity modules (SIMs) in India, up from a mere 10 million in 2000.

OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY SOCIAL MEDIA:

Put apart the concerns, the use of social media has improved the the educational canvas in many ways and its impact is seen in varied areas. Hardly there was any noticeable change in the context of formal education in last 1000 years in terms of essential elements- a teacher, some learners, a classroom, learning content, examinations and some sort of certification, also the way education was imparted remained the same as to teacher-centric and didactic. It is only with the introduction of internet in the 20th century, the delivery of learning experiences is undergoing advancement in terms of its constituents and processes along with the overall results, such as:

- Easy creation and phenomenal sharing of enriched and enhanced learning experiences.
- Personalizing a learning experience to make it suitable for learners with different types of intelligences (Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theories), different styles of learning (David Colb's experiential learning theory) and share it across time and space.

Now the question which strikes to the minds of people concerned with the field of education is - does ICT-based social media auger well for education? One comes across differing opinions possessed by different people while searching for its answer. Among naysayers is American author **Carr(2010)** argued that while the internet improves our cognitive ability to skim and scan, it diminishes our intellectual capacity to concentrate and contemplate. Too much use of internet, gradually, makes us incapable of long form reading and long hours of intellectual focus. This supports Canadian philosopher of communication, **McLuhan's** (1968) observation that- media are not just means of communication they also shape the process of thought.

Sceptics of social media in education also include many teachers and parents, who believe that just like television and video games, social media has only added to the stack of distractions that compete for the learner's time and attention today. Among others are the concerns regarding the added problem of wrong influences, adverse peer pressure, bullying and time wasting that sometimes happens on social media.

Those in disagreement with these arguments point out that skimming and scanning are important cognitive strategies essential for the information-abundant era we now live in as they now facilitate us quickly sort through the torrent of information to find out more desirable showers of knowledge. It is well- accepted that after finding quality knowledge resources, we still need the ability to concentrate, contemplate, formulate questions and apply the knowledge in novel contexts for deeper comprehension. Thus need of the hour is to cultivate both skimming and scanning, as also concentration and contemplation.

Langer (1997), in her book explains that the natural state of the mind is to seek variety. To pay attention to something for any amount of time, the stimulus must be varied. The lesson for education is that we can use social media to design learning experiences where the

stimulus is more than just a teacher lecturing, by adding online discussions, debates and collaborative 'to-do' activities.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

The following positives of social media thrust educators and learners its use:

- Use of social media improves the ability to assess, analyse, retain and share information of the users.
- It provides an effective platform for developing the power of reasoning and expression by engaging them in conversations, discussions and heated debates done on discussion forums, or as comments posted under a nugget of learning content such as Youtube video or Slideshare presentation.
- It facilitates teachers and students to take initiative and explore co-creation and collaborative learning opportunities across geographies, as the overhead cost of online collaboration is so low.
- Social media offers the possibility of better forms of assessment or deep understanding which facilitates application of knowledge in novel contexts and finding creative and innovative solutions to the challenges posed by life.
- It helps move a learner from being extrinsically motivated to intrinsically motivated by offering all the three pillars of self-motivation –autonomy (learners can independently take initiative, mastery (through multiple representations and multiple presentations of understanding) and purpose (learners can apply their knowledge and skills to a cause that appeal them) and also, depending upon the performance, their reputation is always on stake in social media.
- Even social media based games have the potential for positive influence, provided they don't become an addiction.
- It has the possible scalability and low cost structure to address the 'Education for All' challenge that high population countries like India face.

NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

Following are the issues which need to be resolved for making social media a boon for the present and the coming generations:

- Reliability of content on the social media comes under suspicion as everyone is free to post any kind of content on the social media. There is no authenticity of the data posted nor can everything be taken at its face value.
 - Constant networking can cause distractions, especially for children and college students who find it difficult to pay attention to their academics and therefore end up getting lower grades. This also results in a lack of concentration or prioritisation of important issues in their daily life (Taprial, 2013).
- Spending long hours in front of the computer or with the electronic devices can cause serious health problems, strain the eyes and also causes the person to get lethargic. Keeping awake till late nights can lead to sleep deprivation and physical stress and fatigue.
- The most worrying aspect of social media is the fact that it can't be controlled; therefore its consequences can also be dangerous and uncontrollable for all those who use it recklessly and in an uncontrolled manner.
- The very nature of social media, providing the prospects of uninterrupted and enhanced social interaction makes it not only interesting but also addictive for young learners, which has its own pitfalls.
- Other serious concerns resulting out of use of social media are cyber bullying and loss of privacy which gives additional strain to the mind of students in the form of peer pressure to stay updated and look interesting.
- Frequent networking on sites like Facebook could also generate negative feelings like inadequacy, envy, jealousy or even aggressive behaviour due to constant comparison with their own colleagues, friends and peers who always appear to be better-off. These comparisons can make one's success feel diminished and failures amplified.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the benefits of social media in education far outweigh the drawbacks and hence there is a need to integrate social media into the education. Like any other technology, social media also has the potential to become a bane or boon depending upon how it is used. Just as the internet has made access to knowledge and wisdom as easily accessible as pornography, social media will also influence the educational scenario, in India and the world, in a mixed way. There is a need to address the problems which may mar the utility of deployment of social media in education. But the conversation, collaboration, coherence, global reach, scalability and low-cost dimensions that social media

offer can be a blessing for a meaningful, effective and engaging education for all, provided they are used prudently.

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