Effectiveness of Social Networking Sites in the Environment of Higher Education

Swapan Kumar Bera

Librarian,
Baruipur College,
Purandarpur Math, Baruipur,
South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India.
beraswapan@gmail.com

Structured Abstract:

Background: Higher education, often referred to as tertiary education, represents an advanced level of learning where students engage in acquiring and analyzing information to enhance their intellectual capabilities. Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have become increasingly prevalent among students, serving as platforms for communication and information exchange.

Purpose: This paper aims to explore the role of social networking sites in higher education, focusing on their positive and negative impacts on students' academic experiences.

Methods: The study reviews the concept of social networking sites, social media, and their integration into higher education. It examines popular SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp, analyzing their use by students for academic purposes, including studying, collaboration, and information sharing.

Results: Social networking sites facilitate open communication and provide a platform for students to discuss ideas, share information, and engage in academic activities. They support diverse functions such as online learning, e-mails, and collaborative projects. However, the influence of SNSs is dual-natured, with positive effects including enhanced connectivity and resource sharing, and negative effects such as potential distractions and reduced academic focus.

Conclusion: Social networking sites significantly influence higher education by offering new opportunities for academic engagement while posing challenges that require careful management. This paper highlights the need to balance the benefits and drawbacks of SNSs to optimize their role in educational settings.

Keywords: Social networking sites, higher education, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flicker, Google+, iGoogle, WhatsApp, etc.

Introduction

In digital age, social networking sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Flicker, Google+, iGoogle, WhatsApp, Quora, Tumblr, Instagram, Skype, Snapchat, Pinterest, etc. are the latest examples of the communication technologies those have been widely and gradually adopted by the students of higher education and attracting the attention to various academic fields in higher education as well as research fields.

The social networking sites have changed the student's approach to learn and manage the information about their academic and personal lives. In higher education environment, students access social networking sites through internet connection to make learning easier. The role of social networking sites is not limited to social interaction only. In present, social networking sites have found their way in business, learning, works and other purposes. Higher learning such as universities and colleges has noticed the significant of social networking sites to facilitate learning and achieve their institutional goals. A social network comprises of a set of individuals who are interconnected through certain relationships such as friendship, co-working or information exchange (Garton, Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 1997). For example, electronic-mail (e-mail) messages were used by early Internet adopters to establish various patterns of online communication where users could interact with one another by sharing photos or discussing about several issues (Mislove et al., 2007). Every day, more than 90 percent of college students visit a social networking site. The increasing use of social networking sites by students in higher education environment has given rise to a great concern related to their academic achievement.

Objectives of the Study

1. To define the terms of social networking sites, social media and higher education.

2. To identify the different social networking sites used by the students in higher education environment.

3. The main objective of this paper is to explain the positive and negative effects of social networking sites on students in higher education environment.

Higher Education

As we know that higher education is that education which a student receives after the completion of higher secondary education. It takes places at colleges and universities, normally includes undergraduate and postgraduate study.

Definition: Higher education comprises all post-secondary education, training and research guidance at education institutions such as universities that are authorized as institutions of higher education by state authorities.

Higher education covers a wider range of higher learning institutions including the university. These higher learning institutions could be organized in different ways, commonly within a university and in a separate institution as university and other tertiary learning institutions. For instance, a university, from the British perspective, is an institution with its power to award its own degree and is preeminent in the field of research (Allen, 1988). Generally, higher education is a set that constitutes the university, which is a subset of higher education. However, in some contexts, higher education and university are used interchangeably (Assié-Lumumba, 2005).

Modern higher education is defined as an organized tertiary learning and training activities and institutions that include conventional universities such as arts, humanities, and science faculties and more specialized university institutions in agriculture, engineering, science, and technology. The concept of higher education also includes such post-secondary institutions like polytechnics, colleges of education, and "grandes école." Under the umbrella of higher education come all forms of professional institutions. Even this wide spectrum does not exhaust the possibilities of forms of higher education (AssiéLumumba, 2005).

Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein defines **social media** as, "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allowed the creation and exchange of user generated content."

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites (SNS) have become popular with the help of digital technologies (tablet, smartphone, notebook, etc.) and internet recently (Boyd &Ellison, 2007). Social media is a virtual platform. This platform helps people to make new connections, to improve friendly relations with other humans, and to exchange information (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008; Wang, Chen, & Liang, 2011).

Boyd and Ellison (2008), "SNS can be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". In summary, SNS can be defined as any web-based services that provide means for the users to interact through internet. Based on these definitions, SNS can be described as the internet-based platform that allow people to perform interaction among other social networking sites users using the available embedded features.

According to Techopedia.com, "a **social networking site** is an online platform that allow users to create a public profile and interact with other users of the website. Social networking sites usually have a new user input a list of people with whom they share a connection and then allow the people on the list to confirm or deny the connection. After connections are established, the new user can search the networks of connections to make more connections."

Social Networking Site and Social Media

The difference between the social media and social networking site is that while the term social media is a platform for broadcasting information (communications channel) whereas social networking is a platform for communicating with one another (two-way communication). Social media and social network appear to be interchangeable terms, but they serve different use cases.

The different Social Networking Sites used in Higher Education environment

Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Flicker, Google+, iGoogle, WhatsApp, Quora, Tumblr, Instagram, Skype, viper, line, snapchat and Pinterest, have established themselves as powerful communication and collaboration sites due to the perceived   educational needs of the current generation of students enrolled in higher education.

Facebook: Higher education stakeholders in developed countries have been quick to grasp the use of Facebook in getting positive education outcomes. According to information posted on Facebook website in 2007, Facebook's primary purpose was to "share information with people you know, see what's going on with your friends, and look up people around you" (Facebook.com, 2007 as cited in Sheldon, 2008). Facebook has become an integral part of college life for students, serving as the primary tool of communication and electronic socialization (Golder, Wilkinson, & Hubernian, 2007). Mark Zuckerberg, an undergraduate student at Harvard, designed Facebook in February 2004 (Sheldon, 2008).

Indeed, the rising popularity of Facebook has brought students and faculty face to face in the same social space. Mazer et al. (2007, 2009) find that teachers who actively self-disclose on Facebook profiles increases anticipated student motivation, affective learning, and teacher credibility. Further, networking on Facebook increases students' willing to communicate with their instructors (Sturgeon & Walker, 2009). As a tool of learning, Facebook has also reached universities. The web link of Facebook is – http://www.facebook.com.

Twitter: Twitter is a popular American microblogging and social networking service on which users post and interact with messages up to 140 characters known as "tweets". Twitter was created by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams in March 2006 and launched in July of that year. Since its inception in 2006, Twitter has opened up a new channel of information dissemination, and has seen tremendous user growth. Among the social networking sites, Twitter is the one of social networking site that has been widely used by academic institutions such as higher education.

Basically, Twitter has been used as a communication as well as learning tool in the higher education environment. It has been used as a tool of student interactions and informal learning which increases the activity of participants and improves students' communication. It has been used to encourage learning and idea and sharing the knowledge. It is the most advanced and growing microblogging service. As Haythornthwaite (2016) presented in a case study of social media tools in higher education, Twitter is among the top two tools which educators have expressed inclination to use in their future classrooms, ranked before other popular SNS tools such as Facebook. Higher education institutions are increasingly using social media as a platform of communication with students, faculty, other institutions and the public. The web link of Twitter is http://www.twitter.com.

YouTube: YouTube on higher education became more prominent and it became important tool of learning in higher education. YouTube allows users to upload, view, share, like and download videos. YouTube is an American video sharing platform founded in February 2005 and purchased by Google in 2006. The YouTube has a great impact on education and learning experience of the students. It helps adding a new innovative and interesting dimension in the traditional education system. From students to teachers, YouTube has made the learning and teaching method easy. YouTube is a perfect education tool to bring diversity of content in classroom. The most appreciated and viewed educational channels on YouTube are TED-Ed, Smarter Every Day, Vsauce, Asap SCIENCE, National Geographic, Science, exploration and adventure. Its audio-visual quality has made it an effective educational tool. Web address of YouTube is: https://www.youtube.com.

Skype: Skype was founded by Estonian developers Zahti Heinla, Priit Kasesalu and Jaan Tallinn, Danish developer Janus Friis and Sweden's Niklas Zennstrom. Skype is a freeware communication tool that was launched in Estonia in 2003, and was purchased by eBay in 2005 for $2.6 billion dollars. Skype is an effective no-cost tool that allows you to remotely talk with and see others via the Internet from anywhere in the world. Once you download Skype to your computers it allows you to communicate with people all over the world for FREE, with an Internet connection.

Skype is connecting with anyone, anywhere, at any time. This means students not only connect with teachers but teachers encourage students to broaden their view of the world. Set up virtual connections by contacting other teachers then connect the students to each other. Also, Skype has whole portal dedicated to educators who can use it to teach various lessons already set up by the Skype team. The web link of Skype is http://www.skype.com.

Linkedln: LinkedIn was created in 2002, in the living room of Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn. Finally, in 2003, it was launched to the public. While acting as a professional social forum for employers to connect with applicants or search for potential employees. Having students post professional resumes there and then contacting them about the job market and the business world around them keeps them in touch with reality and the endless possibilities through a targeted education. The Web link of Linked in is https://www.in.linkedin.com.

WhatsApp: Brian Acton and Jan Koum founded WhatsApp in 2009 after they left their job at Yahoo!. Users of higher education used WhatsApp for interaction among students, sharing

learning material, because this application is very easy accessibility to learning material. Based

on WhatsApp (2010), this application is a cross-platform smartphone messenger that requires internet data. In terms of its use in educational field, WhatsApp enables students to send text messages, images, video, audio, documents, and even location. It provides students and instructors with the ability to create group that supports interactions of each member. The web link of WhatsApp is https://**web**.**whatsapp**.com.

Google+: Google+ is the social spine of all of Google's products that you already know and use: Google Search, YouTube, Chrome, Android, and Gmail. Google+ is one of the popular social media sites in these days. Google+ was propelled on December 15, 2011, and has joined the major alliances enlisting 418 dynamic million clients as of December 2015. Google+ allows professors, faculty, and researchers to take a proactive approach to knowledge sharing. Professors are able to interact with students and invite high profile guests to participate in office hours using a course Page to host conversations via Hangout. Students are using Google+ to bring school spirit online with events, using party mode to share photos from sports games and activities.

Research Gate: Research gate is a social networking site for researchers, academic professionals to create their own profiles. For access Research gate we have to create our account on research gate then chose our area and uploading our details & image. We have to provide a valid e-mail ID or mobile number. After a long process our research gate account is created. It basically designed for academic community. Research gate help scholars to searching article or thesis for their relative subjects. In research gate we submitted our article. And we also can read others author's publications. This is very helpful site for researchers. The web link of research gate is: https://www.researchgate.net.

Instagram: Instagram was developed in San Francisco by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Instagram is a visual online networking stage. The site has more than 400 million dynamic clients and is possessed by Facebook. A significant number of its clients utilize it to post data about travel, form, sustenance, workmanship and comparable subjects. The stage is likewise recognized by its remarkable channels together with video and photograph altering highlights. Right around 95 percent of Instagram clients additionally utilize Facebook Instagram is a great platform for cultivating an online community for educational institutions.

The easy-to-view and interactive platform allows for low-effort engagement from prospects, students and alumni. The web link of Instagram is http://www.instagram.com.

Effects of Social Networking Sites in Higher Education

Positive Effects:

In the field of education, social networking sites offer a student the opportunity to connect with other students, educators, administrators, alumni, both within and outside his current institution. Scholars praise social-networking sites for their capability to attract, motivate and engage students in meaningful communicative practice, content exchange, and collaboration.

Following is the Positive Effects of Social Networking Sites in Higher Education:

- By spending much time working with new technologies, students develop more familiarity with computers and other electronic devices.
- With the increased focus on technology in education, this will help students build skills that will aid them throughout their lives.
- Google and education, Google has helped over 20 million students in their education using their tools.
- It helps to communicating to teachers.
- By using social networking site students easily do general group discussion and exchanging ideas.
- It has also increased the rate and quality of collaboration for students. They are able to communicate with each other, share information of study material, projects, resources or ideas quickly, which can increase productivity and help them learn how to work well in groups.
- It helps teacher to share information and resources with students.
- Enables research through the exchange of different materials
- Social networking sites offers a way to the students to efficaciously reach every different in regards.
- Many of the students who do not take an interest consistently in class might feel that they can express their thoughts easily on social networking site.
- Teachers may post on social networking site about class activities, school events, homework assignments which will be very useful to them.

- Teachers may also publish on social media approximately elegance activities, faculty activities, homework assignments with a view to be very beneficial to them. (Lad, 2017).

Negative Effects:

The prime bad effect of social media is addiction. Constantly checking Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn other social media updates. This addiction could negatively affect other valued activities like concentrating on studies, taking active part in sports, real life communication and ignoring ground realities.

Following is the Negative Effects of Social Networking Sites in Higher Education:

- Paying more attention towards social networking sites than utilizing this time for their studies.
- Failure to meet study targets.
- Our ability to retain information has decreased, and the willingness to spend more time researching and looking up good information has reduced, due the fact that we got used to the ease of accessibility to information on social networking site.
- Missing classes due to social networking sites.
- Devotes little time to attend to students' class related problems
- Because of social networking sites students lose their ability to engage themselves for face-to-face communication.
- One of the biggest negative effect of social networking site in education is the privacy issues like posting personal information on online sites.
- Students, who attempt to multi-task, checking social media sites while studying, show reduced academic performance.
- One of the biggest negative effect of social networking site in education is the privacy issues like posting personal information on online sites.
- Students, who attempt to multi-task, checking social media sites while studying, show reduced academic performance. Their ability to concentrate on the task at hand is significantly reduced by the distractions that are brought about by YouTube, Facebook or Twitter.
- Many of the bloggers and writers posts wrong information on social sites which leads the education system to failure. (Raut & Patil, 2016)

Conclusion

The Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are being used as learning sites in higher education and plays a major role on improving a student's academic performance. A development in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in present era has grown rapidly having a lot of effect on the lives of humans. Social networking sites are gaining a lot of popularity these days with almost all the educators and educated youth using one or the other such site. These have played a crucial role in bridging boundaries, crossing the seas and enabling them to communicate on a common platform. The main objective of this paper is to descried the different social networking sites and also explain the positive and negative effects of social networking sites on students in higher education environment. The study shows that students in higher education mostly access social networking sites on their mobile and computers for academic and non-academic purpose. They use SNSs to share their homework, assignments and communicate to their friends and teachers. However, there are some positive and negative effects that SNSs come with. Negative effects include that social networking sites destroy a student's academia and have a negative effect on the academia performance as well. An addiction towards Social Networking Sites has grown rapidly and is affecting more students. Students spend less time on their studies but spend more time on the Social Networking Sites for leisure and recreational purpose. Social Networking Sites make student lazier as well. The study shows that in Education field students can get the quality of education, acquire new skills but at the same time he/she may get distracted and addicted by too much use of social networking site. Social networking has affected various fields in both positive as well as negative aspects. Thus, especially college going students who are most likely users of social networking site they should know the right way to use the different social networking sites because if it is used properly, it will be fruitful on the other hand if it is used wrongly, it will be harmful to our life. We have to adopt positive aspects of social networking site and avail the benefits of these latest and emerging technologies.

References

Assie-Lumumba, N. T. (2015). Millennium Development in Retrospect: Higher Education and the Gender Factor in Africa's Development beyond 2015. *Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) in Retrospect. Social Indicators Research Serie*s; Vol. 58, 81-98. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-16166-2_6

Boyd, D. M. & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Coyle, C. L. & Vaughn, H. (2008). Social networking: Communication revolution or evolution? *Bell Labs Technical Journal*, 13(2), 13-17. DOI: 10.1002/bltj.20298

Garton, L., Haythornthwaite, C., & Wellman, B. (1997). Studying online social networks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3(1).

Golder, S. A.,Wilkinson, D. & Huberman, B. (2006). Rhythms of social interaction: messaging within a massive online network. Education ArXiv.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. DOI: 10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003

Lad, H. (2017). The positive and negative impact of social media on "education, teenagers, business and society". *IJIRSET Journal,* 6(10), 19652-19657

Mazer, J. P., Murphy, R. & Simonds, C. J. (2009). The Effects of Teacher Self-Disclosure Via Facebook on Teacher Credibility. *Learning Media and Technology Media and Technology* (2) 175-183. DOI:10.1080/17439880902923655

Mislove, A., Marcon M., Gummadi K., Druschel P., & Bhattacharjee B. (2007). Measurement and analysis of online social networks. Proceedings of Internet Measurement Conference. IMC '07: Proceedings of the 7th ACM SIGCOMM conference on Internet measurement October 2007 Pages 29–42. https://doi.org/10.1145/1298306.1298311

Raut, V. & Patil, P. (2016). Use of social media in education:positive and negative impact on the students. *International Journal on Recent and Innovation Trends in Computing and Communication*, 4(1), 281-285.

Retrieved from http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue1/garton.htm

Sheldon, P. (2008). Student Favorite: Facebook and Motives for its Use Student Favorite: Facebook and Motives for its Use. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273145319_Student_Favorite_Facebook_and_Motives_for_its_Use_Student_Favorite_Facebook_and_Motives_for_its_Use

Sturgeon, C. M. & Walker, C. (2009). Faculty on Facebook: Confirm or Deny? Online Submission, Paper presented at the Annual Instructional Technology Conference (14th, Murfreesboro, TN, Mar 29-31, 2009). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED504605

Tess, P. A. (2013). The role of social media in higher education classes (real and virtual)–A literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(5), A60-A68.

Wang, Q., Chen, W. & Liang, Y. (2011). The Effects of Social Media on College Students. Scholars Archive @ JWU. https://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=mba_student