

Social media and its role in research and education

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Abstract

There has been wide academic and research interest in the application of Social Media (SM) modalities, as instructional tools, in contemporary educational settings. Social media uses the “wisdom of crowds” to connect information in a collaborative manner. Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, message boards, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures, and video. Social media is made up of user-driven websites that are usually centered on a specific focus (Digg=news) or feature (del.icio.us=bookmarking). Sometimes, the community itself is the main attraction (Facebook and Myspace = networking). Nowadays social media is very popular to share thoughts with each other in the form of education and research. Many institutions worldwide are connected to each other by social media.

Keywords: Social media, education, research, students

Introduction

In the recent few years the world has experienced a fast transformation into being a global digital village. In this view, the online social networks have emerged as a big player in this transformation. People increasingly use social networks such as Blogs, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to connect, to share information and knowledge, to create contents and to communicate with each other. According to Wikipedia, social media is internet-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings. Social media is all about networking and networking in a way that espouses trust among parties and communities involved. Any website which allows user to share their content, opinions, views and encourages interaction and community building can be classified as a social media. Some popular social media sites are: Face book, YouTube, Twitter, Digg, MySpace, Stumble Upon, Delicious, Scribd, Flickr etc. Social media as the means for any person to: publish digital, creative content, provide and obtain real-time feedback via online discussions, commentary and evaluations; and incorporate changes or corrections to the original content. Due to the ubiquitous nature and pervasive informational function of interactive digital and mobile technologies, social media (SM) has now transformed from being used informally in educational settings to gaining formal acceptance by students, faculty, and

administrators (Aviles & Eastman, 2012; Barnes & Jacobsen, 2012; Tess, 2013; Voorn & Kommers, 2013; Waldeck & Dougherty, 2012; Wang et al., 2012;). This represents a major paradigm shift in education today. Interactive and mobile technologies, under the domain of Web 2.0 communications, span a wide variety of mediums such as blogs, wikis, social networking, and virtual worlds (Moran & Tinti-Kane, 2012).

Defining social media

Marchese, 2007 defines social media is not the media itself, but the system of discovery, distribution, consumption and conversation surrounding the media.

Drury (2008) defines social media as online resources that people use to share content: video, photos, images, text, ideas, insight, humor, opinion, gossip, news.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describes social media is a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.

Social media can be defined as internet based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. It is the way to build relationships, share information, and connect with diverse audience of people you may never meet in real life.

History of social media

The earliest ways to send messages over long distances were probably both audio and visual. People used to communicate smoke signals by day and beacon fires by night in ancient China, Egypt, and Greece. The 18th and 19th century were breakthrough period where devices like the telegraph (1792), telephone (1890) and radio (1891) ushered in a new era of the sending and receiving messages over long distances.

The increasing number of express messages between businesses, financial and legal offices and banks in growing cities, as well as busy street traffic, gave rise to new methods of telegram and letter transportation. The invention of telephone and radio took the meaning of communication to another level.

The 20th century was marked by the growth and development of internet. With the growth and development of internet, there came era of exchange of messages from one person to another digitally or via web. Email, ARPANET, USENET, BBS (Bulletin Board System), IRC (Internet Relay Chat), Listserv, Blogger, Six Degrees, Live journal, Napster were some of the important sites for social interactions and sharing. The 21st century saw a spurt in the growth of social networking sites by the launching of Friendster, Fotolog, Photo bucket, Flickr, Orkut, Face book, Ning, Digg, Twitter, Netlog, Youtube etc. Major social networks and social media websites make changes and improvements on a fairly regular basis, so it's sure to keep evolving in coming years.

Characteristics of social media

Participation- Allow interested people an opportunity to engage in an interaction. Social media allows people to share and engage with each other so that they enable content shared to become more democratized than ever before (Drury, 2008). Social media has been employed by a number of organizations in order to facilitate a participative culture (Rosso *et al.* 2008).

Conversationality- Social media enables two-way conversations rather than one-directional transmissions or distributions of information to an audience. Traditional channels, such as television, radio, newspaper, and magazine, only deliver a linear communication mechanism; the Internet provides a non-linear or two-way communication environment (Rowley, 2008). SNSs like Facebook offer numerous communication components for conversations between users, micro-blogging tools like Twitter and content communities like YouTube have comparatively more

limited conversationality or two-way communication because of the core utilities and structures inherent in these social media (Pilch, 2009).

Connectedness- People feels close and amiable with others, identify with them, and engage with social groups. Interpersonal ties can be maintained by not only face-to-face communication but also mediated interaction via communication technologies (Wellman & Gulia, 2006). SNSs to connect individuals with acquaintances as well as strangers, the public display and articulation of one's connections which often result in new connections between more individuals is what makes social media unique (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). By providing web links to other sites, resources, and people, social media allows media users to move from one point to others in cyberspace, and offers connectedness to its users (Mayfield, 2008).

Community- Allow individuals and organizations to identify and communicate with the people whom they want to be associated with. Social media as an effective means of developing communities like most SNS were launched to support niche demographics in an intimate, private community (Boyd & Ellison 2007). Social media offers a mechanism for individuals and organizations to form communities quickly and to develop relationships effectively with others who share some commonality with them (Mayfield, 2008). For example, viewers post various online comments on a news story or video have something in common but might not necessarily be seen as belonging to a community. It provides an effective means of developing communities, but its core utility is in linking individuals and organizations with others that share a certain commonality, as determined by their temporal needs and interests at the time of interaction.

Openness- Participation by accessing information or making comments. Klue (2007) asserted that web is a near-frictionless media channel along which anything can flow while most channels have frictions or barriers to the flow of information and knowledge in most surfaces. Most social media contains limited flow barriers, both in applications and technological transferability, so information can easily travel between sources and among users. The openness characteristic is enhanced by social media's networking philosophy and the availability of easy-to-use mechanisms for creating and sharing contents. The evidence openness is prevalent as people, especially the younger generation, share their lives online via social

media sites like Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, and organizations use corporate blogs to distribute information and receive feedback.

Studies based on utilization and effectiveness of social media

Wang *et al.* (2011) studied in China on “The Effect of Social Media on College Students” indicate that 45% respondents admitted that they spent 6-8 hours per day checking social media sites, while 23% spent more than 8 hours; 20% spent 2-4 hours and only 12% spent less than 2 hours on this task.

Singh *et al.* (2012) presented a global study on differences in SNS usage in India to discuss worldwide emerging trends and concluded that there are significant differences in cross-regional preferences for social media networks, and that country specific social media are seen used with more global social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, there is a strong preference for local language in SNS language in India.

Baruah (2012) studied on “Effectiveness of social media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections” in Guwahati and found that 125 respondents said that social media is indeed a major form of communication tool while 75 respondents have replied in negative.

Manjunatha (2013) conducted a study on 500 college students, in Mysore between age group of 18 to 26 years and found that 80 percent of the students spend significant amount of time on using SNS regularly and 20 percent of the students do not spend any time using SNS.

Roy (2015) studied on Impact of Social Media / Social Networks on Education and life of Undergraduate level students of Karimganj town in Assam and found that among the all SNS, facebook is the most popular among the youngsters.

Importance of social media in research and education field

Researcher-specific social networking services-

Research Gate (www.researchgate.net) is a social networking service for scientists and other researchers. It offers a range of functionality including a semantic search engine that browses academic databases. The website was created by Soren Hofmayer in Germany in 2008. The membership is free, and there are over 1.9 million members from 193 countries (ResearchGate 2012).

Graduate Junction (www.graduatejunction.net) is a social networking service aimed at postgraduates and postdoctoral researchers. In India different institute are connected through Face book and Twitter like Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

MethodSpace (www.methodspace.com) is a social network service for social scientists run by the publishers.

Nature Network (http://network.nature.com) is a science-focused social network service run by nature publishing Group.

CiteULike (www.citeulike.com) enables us to store, tag and retrieve bibliographic information.

Mendeley (www.mendeley.com) describes itself as a reference manager and academic social network. It integrates with word and a range of other applications (including CiteULike).

Zotero (www.zotero.org) is another bibliographic service which contains some social/collaboration elements.

Kichanova (2012) studied in Finland and found that social media are a valid source of information for researchers, what exactly the most useful channels are and what kind of purposes they are used for.

Educational applications

Social networks focus on supporting relationships between teacher and student for learning, educator professional development, and content sharing.

A final rise in social network use is being driven by college students using the services to network with professionals for internship and job opportunities. Learn Central, Teach Street and other sites are being built to foster relationships that include educational blogs, portfolios, formal and communities, as well as communication such as chats and discussion.

These sites also have content sharing and rating features. 96% of the young people surveyed by the US National School Boards Association to explore into the online behaviors of US 9 to 17 years old reported to be using some form of social networking technology. The findings indicated that education-related topics are the most common, with 60% talking about education-related topics and 50% discussing their schoolwork.

What is clear is that young people regard social networking services as just another part of their social and often school-related activities. (National School Boards Association, 2007).

New forms of relationships and communication have influenced the way people learn and this has been enhanced by the access to the web and greater innovation of the web 2.0 technology and applications. The participants are creators of knowledge and seekers of engaging personal experiences (McLoughlin and Lee, 2008).

With online social networks, people can share and pass knowledge and information to each other, expand their collective knowledge and relationships to the new heights. Education has expanded past local resources and bring information from vast library of knowledge (Horton, M., 2010).

According to ScienceDaily (June 20, 2008), the researchers at the University of Minnesota came with discovery out of social networking sites and went further in suggesting the necessity of the enrichment of emerging ideas about what it means to be a good digital citizen and leader through the use of the online social networks. Despite the application of formal pedagogical practices used in the education sector and especially in universities, we cannot ignore the contributions of informal learning. Young people have now more choices over what, how, and with whom they learn in a wide range of settings: classrooms, after school programs, home-school, formal online learning programs, and web-enabled spaces that dominate popular culture (Greenhow, 2011).

Rana (2012) studied on the use of social networking in academics: benefit and opportunity in Lucknow and found that majority of respondent in Institute and university 97.5% used for searching the job by the use of SNS but in college 95.0% used SNS for diploma. In university level use of Social networking sites for diploma 87.5%, certificate course 82.5%. In institute level use of Social networking sites for distance learning 67.5% diploma 67.5% certificate course 97.5%. In college level use of Social networking sites for distance learning 85% diploma 95.0% certificate course 95.5%.

Bhatt (2014) studied on Microsoft India student, huge educational program running by Microsoft Incorporation, promoting through Facebook, suggested that Microsoft India student is a forum for students in India to connect with Microsoft. This programme enhances the scale of employability by providing best training skills usually taught in academic circles and

including knowledge of various Microsoft technologies.

Roy (2015) studied on Impact of Social Media / Social Networks on education and life of undergraduate level students of Karimganj town- and found that 43.18% people used Social Networking sites for communication with friends, 11% used for uploading photos/videos, 6.81% uses for discussing study materials with their friends, about 38% people used for all the above purposes. Social Networking web sites helped in education by allowing students and teachers in one platform.

Ø Social networking is more recently being used by various government agencies.

Ø Social networking tools serve as a quick and easy way for the government to get the opinion of the public and to keep the public updated on their activity. Example- Public Service Commission of all states of India have web page on Facebook.

Social media is emerging as a potential way of communication. It provide direct channel to politicians for communicating, connecting and engaging with public.

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