



Role Social Media Platforms in Enhancing Interaction and Communication among University Students

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to explore the role of social media platforms in promoting the interaction between learners, educators, and peers keeping with the following objectives. (a) To identify the reasons of using social media by university students (b) to identify the type of content used by learners on social media platforms and (c) to find-out the security concerns of the learners in using social media platforms. The study was delimited to two public universities of the Southern Punjab, Pakistan i.e. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) and The Government Sadiq College Women University (GSCWU) Bahawalpur. It was a descriptive study which collected data from the 250 university students through a questionnaire. The study concludes that university students were using different social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook networks/ Groups, Twitter, LinkedIn and alike enhancing and / or maintaining their interactions and communications with their fellows and instructors. The university students get exposure and connectivity to the diverse perspective of educational landscape of the world by using the social media platforms particularly, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook networking, and YouTube. They post and access different materials and content on the social media platforms. They access educational videos created by experts and learners, infographics and web-blog and/ or posts on the social media platforms for their learning purpose. The university students were providing and receiving feedback on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram YouTube channels. However, they were concerned about the privacy their data leaks and hacking, cyberbullying and unauthorized software/ spyware which cause spying and disturb their privacy.

Keywords: social media, Learner interaction, Collaborative learning, Educational technology



Introduction

Interaction and communication appear to be core components of an effective teaching learning process. the advent of technologies particularly the Information and Communication Technologies (iCTs) have changed the entire landscape of interaction and communication. Ever emerging communication applications (Apps) like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp and alike applications [termed as social media or social media platforms] have seemingly transformed the nature and ways of interaction and communication of the university students. Observingly, the social media is increasingly used by university students for their learning purpose. It has opened new horizons of leaning (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016) and opportunities of interaction. It has become a popular tool of interaction and communication. Its use in education has shifted the patterns of traditional learning into new paradigms of learning and interactions social media like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube (Junco et al., 2011) often said as [online] social media platforms for learning.

The advancement of social media platforms brought about challenges for stakeholders of education particularly the policymakers, educators and teachers to incorporate it in the traditional instructional process. Different approached have are used across the world in this regard. Some of the common approaches are Plenty of work on the subject is going on in the whole world various approaches included training of educators, technical support and availability of the technology along with offering courses and organizing capacity building workshops (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Preparation and dissemination of guideline for the purposeful use of social media platforms can bring a positive change in the entire system of education particularly higher education (Anderson & Dron, 2011).

Literature Review

The use of the social media promotes interactive learning by engaging the learners actively in instructional process. It appears as an effective tool of learning and offers accessibility to extensive learning material(s) like text, audio and video lectures which otherwise may not be easily available to the learners (Anderson & Dron, 2011). In the social media communities referred to as [online distributed] learning communities' comment on the work of each other which works as feedback to improve the work (Junco et al., 2011).

Social media has changed the patterns of communication, relationships and collaboration; and it has brought innovations in the educational system. Now borderless education is a common concept and everyone can interact with anyone living anywhere in the world at any time. It is because of the advancements in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and advent of the social media platforms (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). Mach more than this is expected in the future in the age of the Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics and Data Analytics.

Now-a-days the concept of traditional classroom has been changed from a localized, time and space bound to an anywhere, anytime (24/7) learners' friendly classroom connected with Internet and smart phone. It has created learning space like social media platforms where all the learners



can interact and learn synchronously or asynchronously. Students can locate their study (materials) cooperate, collaborate and share their learning experiences. They can provide feedback on the work of their fellows by commenting in their community/ or groups. The teacher or instructor has a vital role here to keep them on the track through different online activities like comprehensive assignments, readings and questioning by giving deadlines for each of the activities. Through social media platforms, students learn quickly via communication and collaboration with members of their communities. For example, learners can join various specialized groups on Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. to discuss their quarries with their fellows, peers, and educators all over the world. Learning platforms have also provided opportunities for educators to set the online classes and interactive sessions. Educators can assign various tasks and research work to the learners through these platforms. The use of social media platforms in education has shifted the focus from passive to active learning and has established a culture of [online] cooperation, collaboration and continuous engagement (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016) in learning activities.

However, in spite of all above discussion, it is general observation that the use of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram etc.) can distract learners in some irrelevant areas like gaming, drama, chatting, movies, music, and other material(s) that compromises the morality and moral values. Social media's negative aspects also include leakage of the personal information, cybercrimes, propaganda, spreading of misinformation (Junco et al., 2011).

The Role of Social Media in Promoting Learner Interaction

Social media platforms appear to be the growing spaces of synchronous as well as asynchronous interactions with their ever-emerging innovations in new shapes and designs day-by-day. Presently, these platforms seem to have become powerful tools of communication and interaction amongst learners all over the world (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). With the advancement of these platforms now learners are more active and can interact with their peers, educators, and researchers (Anderson & Dron, 2011). The social media platforms allow learners to ask questions, comment and share their ideas and best practices of learning among the community members. A large number of learners from all over the world are making various social media communities or groups where they can share their experiences, practices and the results.

The learners through these groups are exploring new spheres of knowledge. One of the major advantages of social media platforms is the sense of community among learners, educators, peers, and researchers (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). This sense of community motivates learners who feel isolated on social media, to interact with their peers, and various educators and learners explore new areas of interest and learn the various aspects of their field (Livingstone, 2008). Social media plays a pivotal role in developing a sense of belonging, which is essential for online learning (Garrison et al., 2000).



Theoretical Framework

This study is moving around the two-theatrical framework:

Social constructivism

As per Vygotsky (1978), Social Constructivism highlights the importance of social interaction in the learning processes. This theory advocates that learner gets knowledge through interaction, cooperation, and personal proficiencies. Social media platforms give an ideal environment for learning through interactions, discussions, resource sharing, and cooperation in the projects (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Siemens, 2005).

Connectivism

This theory was developed by Siemens (2005). He believed that knowledge and learning occur through information, resources, and connections within the social/ digital media framework. Social media allows learners to interact with the world, experts, and peers through learning communities. This theory moves around the role of technology, learning, and knowledge sharing (Downes, 2012).

Objectives of the study

The present study was conducted to explore the role of social media platforms in promoting the interaction between learners, educators, and peers keeping with the following objectives. (a) To identify the reasons of using social media by university students (b) to identify the type of content used by learners on social media platforms and (c) to find-out the security concerns of the learners in using social media platforms.

Research Methodology

It was a descriptive study which collected data from the university students who were using social media platforms for interaction and communication with their fellows and teachers/ instructors for learning purpose. The study was delimited to two public universities of the Southern Punjab, Pakistan i.e. The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) and The Government Sadiq College Women University (GSCWU) Bahawalpur.

The population of the study consisted on the students of Bachelor Studies (BS) Programmes. It was a quantitative study and the researchers used purposive-cum-convenient sampling technique. Purposive in sense that only those university students were selected for the data collection who were using any of social media platforms for enhancing/ maintaining their interactions and communication with their fellows and instructors or/teachers; and convenient because of the time and resources limitations on part of the researchers. Hence, 250 students were selected on volunteer basis after thorough briefing sessions in the classrooms with permission of the teachers.

After literature review and keeping in the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was developed on five-point Likert Scale to elicit the opinion(s) of the respondents. The questionnaire was piloted and finalized. The finalized questionnaire consisted on closed-ended questions. The data was



collected from 250 students of the Bachelor Studies (BS) Programme from both of the sampled universities The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) and The Government Sadiq College Women University (GSCWU) Bahawalpur. The participants of the study were briefed by the researchers on how to response the items; even they were briefed in Urdu where needed. The observance of the ethical protocol of the research in social sciences was ensured by the researchers. The participants of the study were conversant and using social media platforms for their learning purpose. After the data collection, it was analyzed by using MS Excel through descriptive statistics. The findings of the data analysis are given below.

Data Analysis and Findings

The findings were drawn from the data analysis according to the objectives of the study.

Enhanced Communication and Collaboration: in overall, it was obvious that the participants of the study were using the social media platforms to improve their interactions and communication among their circles and instructors. Social media platforms used to communicate and collaborate are summarized in table 1.

Table 1
Platforms Used for Communication and Collaboration

Social Media Platform	Learners Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook Groups	88	35.2
WhatsApp	50	20.0
Twitter	32	12.8
LinkedIn	34	13.6
Other platforms	46	18.4

Table-1 describes the platforms used for communication and interaction. The data shows that the respondents were using different social media platforms. It demonstrated that 20% of the respondents used WhatsApp; 35.2% of them used Facebook Groups; 12.8% of them used Twitter, 13.6% of them used LinkedIn where 18.4% of them used other platforms for enhancing and / or maintaining their interactions and communications with their fellows and instructors.

Table 2
Exposure to Diverse Perspectives through Social Media

Social Media Platform	Learners' Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Twitter	4	1.6
LinkedIn	14	5.6
Facebook	95	38.0
Instagram	33	13.2
YouTube	104	41.6



Table-2 shows the data about exposure to diverse perspectives of the respondents through social media platforms. The data shows that only 1.6% of the respondents did get exposure by using Twitter; 5.6% of them did so by using LinkedIn; 38% of the respondents affirmed that they did get exposure through Facebook networks; 13.2% of them used Instagram for this purpose and 41.6% of them acknowledged that they were using the YouTube as social media platform for getting exposure to diverse perspective of educational landscape of the world.

Table 3
Types of Content used by Learners on Social Media

Content Types	Percentage Learners' Responses	
	Frequency	
Videos	150	60
Infographics	50	20
Blog Posts	50	20

The data in table-3 shows the type of the content which university students use through social media platforms. The data revealed that almost half of the respondents (60%) accessed educational videos created by experts and learners on social media; 20% used infographics while 20% of them used Blog and/ or posts on the social media platforms for their learning purpose.

Table 4
Response/ Feedback on Social Media Platforms

Social media Platform	Learners' Responses	
	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	94	37.6
Twitter	18	7.2
LinkedIn	30	12.0
Instagram	60	24.0
YouTube	48	19.2

The data in table-4 shows regular responses/ feedback on communication/ or interactive communication on social media platforms. The data shows that 37.6% of the respondents were receiving feedback on Facebook; 7.2% of them get interactive response on Twitter; 12% posted and received feedback on LinkedIn; 24% acclaimed it on the Instagram; and 19.2% posted and received comments on their YouTube channels.

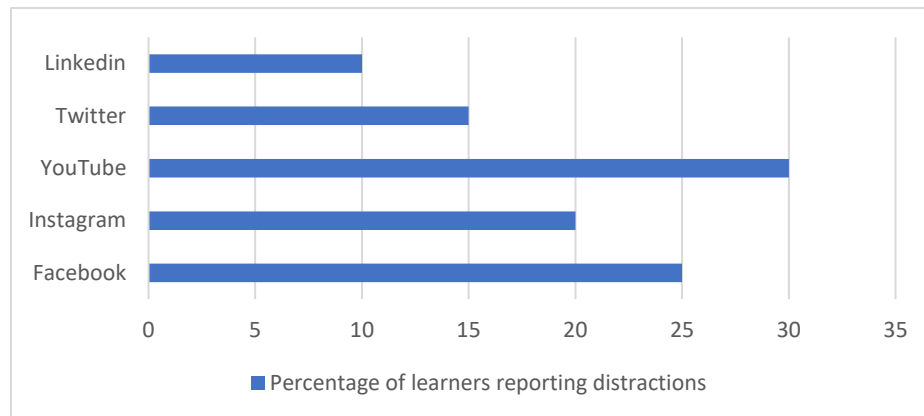
Table 5
Privacy Concerns Reported by Participants

Concern Type	Participants' Concern	
	Frequency	Percentage
Data Breaches	16	6.4
Cyberbullying	98	39.2
Unauthorized Use	136	54.4



Table-5 revealed the privacy concerns reported by the participants. The data describes that 6.4% of the respondents were concerned about the data leaks and hacking; 39.2% of the respondents were of the view that the use of social media platforms causes cyberbullying; whereas, 54.4% of them showed their concerns about unauthorized software/ spyware which cause spying and disturb their privacy.

Figure 1
Percentage of Learners Reporting Distractions



The figure 1 describes the percentage of learners reporting distractions. The data shows that the highest value of social media app is YouTube while LinkedIn had the lowest value of learners reporting distractions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are becoming more and more popular tools for sharing information, fostering peer connection, and increasing student engagement (Ulla & Perales, 2021). All of these elements work together to make learning environments more interactive, dynamic, and attractive. Peer feedback, resource sharing, and the ability to facilitate both synchronous and asynchronous communication among students are among the benefits that have been noted (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). A number of research studies have indicated that social media can play a significant role in interactive learning in the classroom. This finding was supported by the research of Greenhow and Lewin (2016) that social media can enhance interactive learning by motivating students to learn outside of regulated classroom environments. This encourages independence and self-control by giving students more control over their learning process (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). Junco et al. (2011) provide additional support for these findings by highlighting the potential of social media sites like Twitter to raise student engagement and enhance academic results. According to their research, students who participated in Twitter-based conversations performed better academically and were more involved (Er et al., 2022). Similar to this, Aghaee and Keller (2016) highlighted the



importance of ICT-supported peer interactions via social media in courses for bachelor's and master's theses, which enhanced the caliber and depth of student participation.

Conclusion

The study concludes that university students were using different social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook networks/ Groups, Twitter, LinkedIn and alike enhancing and / or maintaining their interactions and communications with their fellows and instructors. The university students get exposure and connectivity to the diverse perspective of educational landscape of the world by using the social media platforms particularly, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook networking, and YouTube. They post and access different materials and content on the social media platforms. They access educational videos created by experts and learners, infographics and web-blog and/ or posts on the social media platforms for their learning purpose. The university students were providing and receiving feedback on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram YouTube channels. However, they were concerned about the privacy their data leaks and hacking, cyberbullying and unauthorized software/ spyware which cause spying and disturb their privacy.

Recommendations

Following recommendations were made on the bases of conclusion of the study

- There should be comprehensive training for both teachers and students for effective use of social media for learning purpose.
- Institution should develop guidelines for development of online communication skills.
- Incorporate social media into the curriculum: Educational planners should incorporate the use of social media in the curriculum and instructors should be trained on the subject for example Twitter or any other social media platform can be used for class discussion, and LinkedIn can be used to connect with industry professionals (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Tess, 2013).
- A comprehensive guideline for appropriate use of social media: IT professionals should educate the instructors and learners on the ethical use of social media and can also guide how to save data, privacy settings, and cybersecurity (Livingstone, 2008; Boyd, 2014).
- Monitoring and evaluation of interactions: A team of professionals can be hired and they can be given task to monitor and evaluate the use of social media among learners and suggest remedial measures. In this way, learners can be controlled and focused on their studies rather than the use of social media content for recreational purposes (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Junco et al., 2011).
- Enhance creativity and critical thinking: learner should be encouraged to enhance their creativity and critical thinking skills development, in this way, they will be more conversant with the use of social media and they will be the ethical thinker who can lead the nation, how to use digital learning, digital library access (Selwyn, 2016; Buckingham, 2007).



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