Distance Learning With Social Media

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Abstract

The concept of Distance Learning has been around for quite some time for people seeking Non-Traditional paths, but in the past decade it has gained widespread popularity. One reason for the increased popularity of Distance Learning is a high degree of flexibility. The structure of Distance Learning gives students the greatest possible control over the time, place and pace of education. At the same time, Social Media have gained wide societal interest. In this paper we will explores the potential of Social Media for increasing student engagement for Distance Learning. Loss of student motivation due to the lack of face-to-face contact with teachers and peers, potentially prohibitive start-up costs, and lack of faculty support are all barriers to successful Distance Learning. Because these students are often not on campus, they do not fall under the traditional paradigm of engagement that includes faculty-student interaction and active and collaborative learning in a face-to-face classroom.

Keywords: Social Media, Distance Learning, Online Education.

1. Introduction

Distance Learning is a formalized teaching and learning system specifically designed to be carried out remotely. It is a reliable alternative to face-to-face education. It is less expensive to support and is not constrained by geographic considerations, it offers opportunities in situations where traditional education has difficulty operating. People with scheduling or distance problems can benefit, because it can be more flexible in terms of time and can be delivered virtually anywhere. After discovering the benefits of Distance Learning, many people are choosing Distance Learning programs [1]. One in four higher education students in the United States now take at least one online course during their undergraduate career. Evidence of the growth of Distance Education can be seen in the results of a survey conducted by National Centre for Education Statistics America in 2011 there were about 4.3 million undergraduate students that took at least one Distance Learning course or Online course (Figure 1). This amounts to 20 percent of all undergraduates enrolled in the 2007-2008 year. There were about 0.8 million or 4 percent of all undergraduates that completed their entire undergraduate degree online during the same period.
The most striking difference between the Traditional and Distance Learning classrooms are in the area of communication and interaction. Faculty members in the Distance Learning environment do not have the benefit of seeing student’s nonverbal cues to gauge how well they are teaching [2]. So Distance Learning requires different communication methods than those needed in traditional classrooms. Popular present day methods include:

- a) Voice-centered technology, such as CD or MP3 recordings or Webcasts
- b) Video technology, such as instructional videos, DVDs, and interactive videoconferencing
- c) Computer-centered technology delivered over the Internet or corporate intranet

These platforms have generally been used as static repositories of content, failing to provide the robust social experience found on platforms that have garnered societal interest and appeal, such as Social Media Sites.

Furthermore, these platforms have been criticized for suppressing motivation and enthusiasm and failing to support personalization. As a result, educators have begun exploring alternative platforms to provide learners with the social communication tools that allow for ease of use, pedagogical freedom, fluid online discussions, and identity management. Social Media has been viewed as a tool that enables the use of participatory pedagogies able to address the problems that have traditionally plagued Distance Learning: creating a sense of presence, community-building, and learner participation in interactive discussions [3]. In this paper we find that using online Social Media as educational platforms may support learners in forming social connections with others while they collaborate to share ideas, create products, construct identities, and receive timely feedback.

1.1. Social Networking Sites

Social Networking Sites have become significant part of our modern life and have created a whole new world where we are free to express our opinion and share it with our friends and peers. This world of Social Networking gives scope to everyone to express and share ideas, thoughts and feelings, who want to be the part of it. It is a defining trait of how integrated our social interactions have become. These Sites are virtual spaces that build virtual communities through sharing experiences, communicating personal information, and connecting to friends. These are a primary means of communication and have moved private lives into a public forum [4]. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Center America December 2012, 67% of online adults use Social Networking Sites (Figure 2). Women have been significantly more likely to use Social Networking Sites than men since 2009. In December 2012, 71% of women were users of Social Networking Sites, compared with 62% of men. The use of Social
Networking Sites among young adult internet users ages 18-29 jumped from 9% to 49%. Social Networking Site use by age group, over time:

Figure 2. Social networking site use according to a study conducted by Pew Research Center America

The extensive use of Social Networking Sites and their reliance on society make them essential to consider as ways to promote student engagement. Moreover, these sites provide a social outlet for students despite the barriers of distance, and it has been shown that interaction with friends at school is significantly higher for students who spend more time on these sites [5]. Social networking sites are an “easier way to connect in a disconnected world”.

Social Networking Sites encourage user contributions and participation, and the services are more users oriented instead of content oriented. The services allow users to participate in online activities in a proactive way. With Social Networking Sites, users easily share information, comment, and even modify other user-created content. The open atmosphere greatly encourages content sharing and allows users to get feedback on content they have created. Compared to traditional media, Social Media promotes two-way communication among users [6].

Also facilitates community building for users of similar interests. In a user group community, users can stay focused on relevant content and topics that everyone is interested in, and with the connections to other users, they can easily keep up on what is happening in a particular field. All of these features not only benefit professionals and computer geeks, but they are also same valuable to Distance Educators and Learners.

1.2. Social Networking Sites as Educational Tool

When appropriately integrated into the online classroom, Social Networking Sites can offer innovative learning experiences and enhanced learner engagement. Distance Learning in past has been plagued by feelings of learner isolation and alienation, lack of participant interaction (both student-student and student-instructor), and high dropout rates. Social Networking Sites have the potential to facilitate interaction, communication, and collaboration [7]. Social Networks enable learners and instructors to
present themselves socially in an online environment and connect with one another while enabling individuals to engage in recurring meaningful experiences with others. With the prevalence of various tools, faculty can design creative online learning activities by asking students to use one or more tools to work on their learning tasks and achieve their learning objectives.

Online collaboration becomes much easier when it is facilitated by Social Media technologies. For instance, students can collaborate on team project documents. Students in the same study group can co-draft documents, spread sheets, presentation slides. Each study group can also create a presentation through a Web conferencing tool. With the popularity of blogging and micro-blogging, it is not uncommon for faculty to use blogs as additional teaching/learning resources. Faculty may publish academic journals or articles on his/her own blog and students may post discussion comments on them in the threaded comments area [8]. Discussions can become an extension of learning in the online classroom, and they can help students keep up with what is happening in the real world. Some faculty has even used online accounts to remind students of homework, upcoming events, and other important items. Students can immediately receive these reminders through their mobile phones if they have the correct setup in their online accounts. Academic research can also benefit from using Social Media tools. In particular, social bookmarking is extremely useful for literature reviews and collaborative research. Many professors teaching graduate-level classes found that Social Media is an attractive tool to assist students with their own research projects. By using the highlighting and sticky notes, online reading becomes much easier. Students can review and respond to the reading notes from their classmates and the instructor. As a result, reflective thinking and collaborative learning are highly encouraged with this tool [9]. Social Media also allows students to build or join communities to connect with people who share the same academic interests, leading them to easily share and locate more resources that are relevant to their research topics [10].

1.3. Social Media in Career

Social Media has created a new breed of marketing, which has required professionals to build and further the field. As Social Media users join the workforce, they bring their skills to their careers. Social Media prepares young workers to become great marketers. It has become essential for major businesses to include a Social Media marketing strategy and students today are the people filling these positions.

Social media sites help employers find employees and job-seekers find work. 64% of companies are on two or more social networks for recruiting because of the wider pool of applicants and more efficient searching capabilities. 89% of job recruiters have hired employees through LinkedIn, 26% through Facebook, and 15% through Twitter. One in six job-seekers credit social media for helping find their current job. 52% of job-seekers use Facebook for the job search, 38% use LinkedIn, and 34% use Twitter. While older generations might not completely understand or agree with the amount of social media activity by today’s student population, they will quickly benefit from it. As technology advances, so does the way the world works with it. Members of the young workforce are keeping up to speed with many forms of Social Media. Once you get a proper Social Media marketing strategy locked in, you’ll be grateful for the recent graduate you’ve hired to carry out the details.

2. Pro and Cons

Researchers at the University of Minnesota (USA) have discovered the educational benefits of social networking sites in a study. They found that low-income students are in many ways just as technologically proficient as middle- and upper-income students, going against what results from previous studies have suggested. "What we found was that students using social networking sites are actually practicing the kinds of 21st-century skills we want them to develop to be successful today," says Christine Greenhow, a learning technologies researcher in the University's College of Education and Human Development and principal investigator of the study. "Students are developing a positive attitude towards using technology systems, editing and customizing content, and thinking about online design and layout."
"Now that we know what skills students are learning and what experiences they're being exposed to, we can help foster and extend those skills," says Greenhow. "As educators, we always want to know where our students are coming from and what they're interested in so we can build on that in our teaching. By understanding how students may be positively using these networking technologies in their daily lives and where the as-yet-unrecognized educational opportunities are, we can help make schools even more relevant, connected, and meaningful.

Along with the benefits, students who use Social media tools might pay significant hidden cognitive costs. Social Networking Sites simultaneously seize and fragment our attention. They can subvert higher-order reasoning processes, including the kind of focus, concentration, and persistence necessary for critical thinking and intellectual development. Some researchers have correlated heavy Internet use with greater impulsivity, less patience, less tenacity, and weaker critical thinking skills. The need to rapidly shift from object to object online can weaken students’ ability to control their attention. Prolonged Internet use exposes students to interactive, repetitive, and addictive stimuli that produce permanent changes in brain structure and function. The more one uses the Internet and Social Media, the better the brain can skim and scan. But research suggests that these gains degrade the capacity for concentration, reasoning, and reflection—in fact the very sort of critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning needed to honestly appraise the full costs of using Social Media.

**Learning and research capabilities:** Students have started relying more on the easily accessible information on these sites. This reduces their learning and research capabilities.

**Focus:** Students who get involved in activities on social media sites while studying result in reduction in their focus of attention. This causes reduction in their academic performance, and concentration to study well.

**Real human contact:** The more time the students spend on these social media sites, the less time they will spend socializing in person with others. This reduces their communication skills. They will not be able to communicate and socialize effectively in person with others. The employers are getting more and more unsatisfied with the communication skills of the fresh graduates due to this reason. The effective communication skills are key to success in the real world.

**Command over language:** Students mostly use slang words or shortened forms of words on social media sites. They start relying on the computer grammar and spelling check features. This reduces their command over the language and their creative writing skills.

### 2.1 Research Study

The purpose of this research study is to explore the impact of Social Media on students. A research questionnaire was designed to determine the factors of Social Media that have impact on students. Variables identified are age, gender, education, social influence and academic performance. 168 respondents that were only students were randomly selected. The study concluded that students whose age range from 15 to 25 mostly use Social Media for entertainment. 60% of male students commonly used for knowledge. Graduation students generally prefer for entertainment. From this research study it was also found that people can use Social Media due to social influence. This study determines that most of students use Social Media due to their friends and its total average is 67.3% of total sample. Students having 3.0 to 3.5 GPA (Grade Point Average) mostly use Social Media for entertainment.

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2.2 Research Findings

This research is conducted to explore the effect of Social Media and its impact on academic life and learning experiences of students. According to the results gathered from 168 respondents shown in the above table Social Media grabs the total attention and concentration of the students and diverts it towards non educational, unethical and inappropriate actions such as useless chatting, time killing by random searching and not doing their jobs. Students and teenagers mostly use Social Media for time killing and sake of enjoyment but it has been analyzed that internet use for education purpose and any appropriate task including online tutorials, online lectures and education material downloading is very good but use of internet for only Social Media is very useless perhaps dangerous.

3. Conclusion

A lot of criticism has been leveled at Social Media and the effect it has on the way students process and retain information, as well as how distracting it can be. However, Social Networking Sites offers plenty of opportunities for learning and interactivity, and if you take a moment to think about it, it’s not too hard to see how students benefit from using Social Media. As younger generations use such technology in the classroom, they remake the educational landscape.

There are so many ways Social Media has changed the world, and the education especially Distance Learning Programs are the most significant. Up to this point, Social Media has a firm place in our future, where it is hoped that the capabilities of these interactive platforms will be extended.

In summary, there are clear advantages to use social media in Distance Learning. With Social Media services, online teachers and learners can experience new and better types of communication and interaction, and they can be more connected to each other than ever before. Social Media tools help online learners feel less isolated. With Social Media technologies advancing, distance education will continuously evolve with the trend. Students are experiencing the world through more than just books and assignments; they are learning and adapting to the world using a relatively new form of communication. In a world where connections are important, graduates are coming into the workplace with a lot to offer.

3.1 Recommendation for Future

The current research has demonstrated that, if we utilize Social Media properly, it can facilitate distance and extra-curricular learning and enable students to learn outside of the classroom in an engaged way. It can help students who do not have access to adequate schooling to supplement their studies with high quality tools. Furthermore, students whose educations are interrupted regularly will also be able to access information that can bridge the gap and make transition back to school easier.

A general recommendation is that more research needs to be done about policy of Authorization of Social Media Sites. Use good judgment about content, respect privacy laws and exercise discretion in posting content that could reflect negatively on users or the Institution. Violators of this Policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal from the College or termination of employment.

References


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