

Learning and Social Media

Mofarah Mohammed Al-Shahrani

Abstract

The aim of this study was to review the studies carried out on social media and learning. Various databases were searched for keywords 'social media', 'education', 'learning', 'higher education'. These studies were shortlisted as per the year of publication. Studies showed that the use of social media amongst people has increased multifold, especially amongst the youth. Authors have talked about how social media is slowly being integrated into learning and education, even higher education. Social media technologies are being used in distance and online education. Authors also talk about how teachers are having to go through training in order to get familiar with and adept in the use of social media, in order to facilitate teaching processes. Studies show that for it to be successful it is important that social media usage in learning and education is researched extensively.

Keywords: Social Media, Learning, Technology Enabled Learning, Review

Introduction

The explosive progress of social media has touched all areas of society, including professional and personal lives. Even the field of learning and education has not gone unaffected. According to Ean & Lee (2016), "in the 21st century, social media has burgeoned into one of the most used channels of communication in the society. As social media becomes well recognised for its potential as a social communication channel, recent years have witnessed an increased interest of using social media in higher education". Hence, in the recent years, there has been increasing move towards use of social media in learning and education.

Methodology

In this paper, we will review research studies which have been carried out on the subject of learning and social media. Towards this end, search terms such as 'social media + education', 'social media + learning', 'social media + higher education' etc. were used in the Google Scholar search engine. The results of these searches were shortlisted as per the year of publication. For the purpose of this paper, only studies published post 201 were used in order to explore the phenomenon of social media and learning.

Results and Discussion

Social media has been getting integrated into higher education over the last few years. According to the study by Ean & Lee (2016), learning environments in higher education are progressing towards the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) such as social media. Recent years have seen an increased interest of using social media in higher education which has led to a growing phenomenon of the educational use of social networking sites such as Facebook, to create, engage, and share information among the students (Ean & Lee, 2016). Hence, social media networking websites are being used for the purpose of attaining goals of higher education.

Social Media in Higher Education

According to the study by Ean & Lee (2016), since 2006, scholars have begun to investigate the use of various social media tools in education such as Web 2.0 (Grosseck, 2009); wikis and blogs (Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006); Facebook (Lewis et al., 2008; Pasek, More, & Hargittai, 2009); Twitter (Grosseck, & Holotescu, 2008); and social media in general (Rheingold, 2008; Våljataga, & Fiedler, 2009). Boulos, Maramba, and Wheeler's (2006) research shows the potential impact of wiki, blogs and podcasts on higher education in the United Kingdom and the combined use of the three applications yield the most powerful learning experience (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). Grosseck (2009) validates Boulos, Maramba, and Wheeler's (2006) study because she claimed that "Web 2.0 applications have an emerging role to transform teaching and learning and it might constitute a new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) pedagogy in the 21st century known as pedagogy 2.0. Grosseck (2009) further promotes a scholarly inquiry about the need of a new type of pedagogy based on Web 2.0 together with the development and adoption of the best practices for teaching and learning in higher education". Her article stated that Web 2.0 is the future of higher education, but empirical research is required in order to find the best way "to leverage these emerging tools for teaching and learning purposes" (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016).

Among the studies exploring the use of social media in higher education in the 21st century, studies such as Liu (2010); Silius, Kailanto & Tervakari (2011); Chen & Bryer (2012); and Selwyn (2012), have demonstrated the continued growth of evidence of using social media tools in higher education as both students and educators are using this technology for educational purposes (Ean & Lee, 2016). The study by Ean & Lee (2016) says that much of the literature looks positively at leveraging social media technologies in higher education, but there are issues which require careful thinking when applying social media tools in formal learning. Literature says that more empirical research is required in order to find the best way to leverage these emerging tools for teaching and learning activities.

Liu (2010) claimed that social media is universal, especially in the commercial world and educators are now leveraging it in the educational arena (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). According to Liu (2010), "students who are labelled as digital natives can easily embrace new technologies such as social media tools for learning purposes though social media is mostly use for recreational purposes" (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). The study says that the fast progress of technology making an appearance in the market is a big challenge for both teachers as well as students to keep up with. One recommendation from the study by Liu is that future technology integration in education should focus on what the students use instead of what the school wants them to use (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016).

In their study, Silius, Kailanto, and Tervakari (2011) identified that students' attitudes towards use of social media has changed from using it as a communication tool as a past time, to using it as a studying tool (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). According to Ean & Lee (2016), the primary characteristics of a social enhanced learning system that inspire students to use social media in an educational context are: versatile features in supporting a learning community; usable and accessible with robust technological solutions; ease of use; provide clear added value such as support for networking and social interaction; quality of social networking site with quality of community within it; communication and collaboration; privacy and security issues; importance of informational quality; and mechanisms or policies for filtering, marking and removing content of poor quality (Silius, Kailanto, & Tervakari, 2011 – as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016).

Another study reported that social media is not only extensively use by college students but also by educators to connect formal and informal learning and allowing students to connect in new and meaningful ways (Chen, & Bryer, 2012 – as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). The authors concluded that social media in higher education teaching is an emergent area for study; however, there is a need to call for institutional changes to facilitate and encourage experimentation by faculty members who wish to determine the efficacy of social media tools for teaching (Chen, & Bryer, 2012 – as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016).

Selwyn (2012) validated prior researches regarding many higher education institutions and educators now finding themselves expected to catch up with the world of social media applications and social media users (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). The study by Selwyn (2012) stated that the actual use of social media by students is within the educational context as well as in their wider everyday lives. Selwyn (2012) raises issues that “created the disparities between the educational rhetoric and educational realities of social media use and finally suggests higher education community to engage in considered and realistic debates over how best to utilise social media in appropriate ways for higher education settings and not merely on how social media is use in education” (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016).

Definition of Social Media

The use of social media in higher education is an emergent trend since the introduction of Web 2.0 in the 20th century and the popularity of social media in the 21st century. Social media, also known as Web 2.0, came in 2004 when O'Reilly Media and MediaLive hosted the first Web 2.0 conference and Bart Decrem, founder of the popular social-network platform Flock TM called social media as the ‘participatory web’ which comprise the interlinking of people engaging actively and interactively with the content (Bonzo, & Parchoma, 2010, p. 913). Other definitions given include Grosbeck (2009) and Tess (2013). Grosbeck (2009) defined Web 2.0 as the social use of the Web which allow people to collaborate, to get actively involved in creating content, to generate knowledge and to share information online. Tess (2013) defined social media as “a term that is broadly used to describe any number of technological systems related to collaboration and community the task of defining social media is made more challenging by the fact that it is constantly in a state of change” (p. A60-A61). According to Mesquita, Peres & Oliveira (2016), “social media can be defined as the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue”. The study by Tokovarov, Sereja, Nafalski, & Nedic (2018) defines social media as a “combination of the complex technology and Internet applications used for transferring information amongst people within social networks. Their characteristic feature is that they are open access, which allows the content to be created and modified constantly on the Web. A highly important fact is that a user of social media is transformed from a passive consumer to an active prosumer by both creating and using the content on the Internet”.

Teachers and Educators

The increased interest in social media in the field of learning and education means that the teachers and educators have had to use social media as well. But there can be a mismatch of social media usage when it comes to students and teachers. A study by Mirembe, Lubega, & Kibukamusoke (2019) explored how leading universities in Uganda were integrating social media in teaching and learning processes. The study found that while majority of students on social media platforms use these platforms for learning purposes, majority of lecturers never

engaged students on social media. The authors say that there is a mismatch of social media usage between students and teachers.

In many cases, they have had to get trained in using social media, as it is a newer phenomenon. The study by Ean & Lee (2016) talks about a survey by Pearson (Seaman, & Tinti-kane, 2013), The Social Media Survey 2013 which identified that 41% of higher education faculty in the U.S.A. population used social media in teaching in 2013 compared to 34% of them using it in 2012. The survey results also showed the increased use of social media for teaching by educators and faculty professionals is due to the fact that they see the potential in applying and integrating social media technology to their teaching. “Many higher education institutions and educators are now finding themselves expected to catch up with the world of social media applications and social media users. This creates a growing phenomenon for the educational use of social media to create, engage, and share existing or newly produced information between lecturers and students as well as among the students” (Ean & Lee, 2016).

Use of Facebook

Facebook was launched in February 2004 and despite competition by MySpace, Twitter, and LinkedIn, Facebook increased its users in a rapid pace to become one of the biggest social networking sites in USA (Tuunainen, Pitkanen, & Hovi, 2009 – as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). According to The Associated Press (October 23, 2012), Facebook reached 1.01 billion people with 584 million active users each day and 604 million users using Facebook from a mobile device each month (as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). Facebook began with a focus on colleges and universities, but now it has been widely used in high schools, professionals in corporate networks and other organisations such as nonprofit organisation (Boyd, & Ellison, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007 – as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016). Studies show that Facebook has been adopted in universities across the world.

According to the study by Ean & Lee (2016), Facebook has become the social networking site of choice by university students due to the unparalleled adoption rates of Facebook in universities (Muñoz, & Towner, 2009; Roblyer et al., 2010; Sánchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014 – as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016).

Prior literature reveal that the use of Facebook is growing in the educational field. Facebook, a major and popular social networking site with its current active users of 1550 million as in January 2016 (Statista.com, 2016), has been use by college and university students as a social communication channel as well as a platform for educational purposes.

As per the reviewed literature, studies such as Helou, Ab. Rahim, & Oye (2012); Din, Yahya, & Haron (2012); Al-rahmi, & Othman (2013); Al-rahimi, Othman, & Musa (2013), show the positive impact of Facebook use on students’ academic performance in the Malaysian context, while Pasek, More, and Hargittai (2009)’s study shows no evidence of Facebook use to the diminished academic achievement for undergraduate students (-as cited in Ean & Lee, 2016).

Social Learning

Social learning is more than simply consuming content provided by tutors. In social learning, the role of the tutor is to produce the conditions and supportive atmosphere which facilitates learning and sharing. In their paper, Harris & Molesworth (2015) noted that students benefitted from interacting with each other in an online learning platform, “by sharing their stories and building a global network of contacts, both within the MOOC platform itself, and through associated social

media channels”. The authors say that it was clear that this social learning was much more than the wisdom they received from the teacher facilitating the MOOC platform. According to Harris & Molesworth (2015), it was more to do with “participating in a course in such a way that tutors and participants can learn from each other and share what they know”. Also, it has been seen that these students are more comfortable in a MOOC and they expect social media applications to be integrated into offline classes too. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2016), “not only are these future students more comfortable substituting a MOOC for a traditional face-to-face lecture, but they also expect social media applications and user-generated content in general to be integrated into offline classes as well. Microblogging applications such as Twitter (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011 – as cited in Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016) are already used to extend discussions beyond the classroom and to allow students to exchange or tweet their reactions to reading assignments.

Nursing Education and Social Media

Both professional and personal lives of health care professionals are affected by the exponential advance of social media. In general, healthcare professionals and nurses in specific face the issue of how social media is being used. The study by Arrigoni, Alvaro, Vellone & Vanzetta (2016) says that it is important to have a deep understanding of these tools and their potential risks in order to avoid inappropriate use of them. With social media, the line between proper and improper use is a fine one. The study by Arrigoni, Alvaro, Vellone & Vanzetta (2016) says that awareness of the social media tool is important and that it needs to be supported by suitable training for healthcare professionals. This study says that even healthcare students need training instructions during their studies. According to Arrigoni, Alvaro, Vellone & Vanzetta (2016), health workers “have a professional, ethical and legal responsibility to be aware of the impact on care. Trainers should include policies on the use of social media in their curricula and teach students to use them appropriately from the very start of their courses, promoting discussion and analysis on the subjects of confidentiality, privacy and professionalism. Similarly, there is a focus on ethical awareness and hence on building moral development”.

Social Media Community

Building a brand community (or a brand page) in social media has become an important part of stakeholder engagement strategy for organizations today. The same goes for the higher education sector, as universities are increasingly using social media to enhance the student experience and manage brand visibility (Fujita, 2018). As per the study by Fujita (2018), a university’s social media brand communities (SMBCs) operate differently from commercial brands due to the existence of physical communities and reciprocal relationships between students and the university.

Social Media as Learning Technology

In their study, Hussain, Cakir, & Candeğer (2017) studied the phenomenon of social media being used as a learning technology amongst university students at the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The study demonstrated that social media played an important role as a learning technology and that its careful use promoted “opportunities of virtual interactions among university students, instant access to multiple, latest, reliable and students’ preferred sources of learning. It facilitates in nurturing critical thinking, problem solving approach and argumentation among university students by illustrating application of theories and/ or techniques through examples, visuals and illustrations and videos, and assists them with mastery

learning and futuristic approach through task oriented activities” (Hussain, Cakir, & Candeğer, 2017).

Individual Student

Several studies have investigated the use of social media technologies in higher education, but the use of social media at the individual student’s level has not been explored in depth. The study by Josefsson (2017) studied this use of social media. Josefsson (2017) says that it is imperative to understand how the use of the same technology for private and educational purposes will affect or be perceived by the individual. The findings of this study showed that it is essential to communicate expectations when it comes to social media use in teaching. The study found that student attitudes differed from “very negative to very positive, that the use of different social media services impact student attitudes differently, that the concept of intersecting roles can refine portraying the student by, for instance, describing how social media are used to network strategically for professional purposes, and that both students and teachers are compelled to move between roles, resulting in the need to find a suitable balance between private and professional uses of social media” (Josefsson, 2017).

Conclusion

In this paper, we reviewed studies which have been carried out on the subject of social media and learning. Studies showed that the use of social media amongst people has increased multifold, especially amongst the youth. Authors have talked about how social media is slowly being integrated into learning and education, even higher education. Social media technologies are being used in distance and online education. Authors also talk about how teachers are having to go through training in order to get familiar with and adept in the use of social media, in order to facilitate teaching processes. Studies show that for it to be successful it is important that social media usage in learning and education is researched extensively.

References

- Arrigoni, C., Alvaro, R., Vellone, E., & Vanzetta, M. (2016). Social Media and Nurse Education: An Integrative Review of the Literature. *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*, 6(1), 1-8.
- Ean, L.C., & Lee, T.P. (2016). Educational use of Facebook by undergraduate students in Malaysia higher education: A case study of a private university. *Social Media and Technology*, 1(1), 41.
- Fujita, M. (2018). *Enhancing Student-University Relationships through Social Media Brand Communities: An Identity Theories Perspective* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Western Australia, Crawley, Australia.
- Harris, L., & Molesworth, M. (2015). Social Media for Learning in Higher Education. In *Social Media for Learning in Higher Education - Conference Proceedings 2015*.
- Hussain, I., Cakir, O., & Candeğer, U. (2017). Social Media as a Learning Technology for University Students. *International Journal of Instruction*, 11(2), 281-296.
- Josefsson, P. (2017). *Higher education meets private use of social media technologies* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden.

- Kaplan, A.M. & Haenlein, M. (2016). Higher education and the digital revolution: About MOOCs, SPOCs, social media, and the Cookie Monster. *Business Horizons*, 59, 441-450.
- Mesquita, A., Peres, P., & Oliveira, L. (2016). Social Media as a Facilitator of Financial Literacy Competencies in e-Learning Courses: Contribution of the e-Finlit European Project. In C. Bernadas & D. Minchella (eds.) *Proceedings of the 3rd European Conference on Social Media Research* (pp. 232-242). Reading, UK: Academic Conferences and Publishing International Limited.
- Mirembe, D.P., Lubega, J.T., & Kibukamusoke, M. (2019). Leveraging Social Media in Higher Education: A Case of Universities in Uganda. *European Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 22(1), 70-84.
- Tokovarov, M., Sereja, K., Nafalski, A., & Nedic, Z. (2018). Towards the use of selected social media in the process of education at a technical university - study of students' awareness and preferences. *World Transactions on Engineering and Technology Education*, 16(2), 146-150.