

Social Media as Best Practices for Optimizing the Learning at Allama Iqbal Open University

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Abstract

This is an era of information technology and every university is trying to utilize the electronic media for teaching learning effectively. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is a mega university in the field of distance education. This university has made strenuous efforts to convert its traditional method of teaching into innovative approaches and modes. For this purpose the students and faculty members of AIOU are using social media, particularly Facebook to interact with each other regarding their mastery of learning. Use of social media is becoming a key step in the establishment of a knowledge society. Focusing its integral part in the teaching learning process faculty, tutors and students of Ph.D, M. Phil and MS level in different programs of AIOU are concentrating on the gradual use of Facebook as social media for effective and interactive teaching learning. So this study addresses these objectives: (1) Through literature review to analyze the social learning theories and their impact on open distance education in the context of AIOU. (2) To examine the perception of faculty and students about the educational use of Facebook for learning at Post Graduate Level. (3) To identify the problems that students face in using Facebook for learning purposes. (4) To survey the effects of Facebook on the learning of students. In this regards document analysis and questionnaire were used as research tools. The sample technique for this study is purposive as only those faculty and students of Allama Iqbal Open University users of Facebook. Analysis of data showed that Facebook was helpful to promote the culture of sharing knowledge among the students. It also assisted the students and faculty about their academic, professional and institutional administrative matters. It enhanced the capacity building of the users to resolve their educational and professional issues adequately and timely. Hence, due to the internet connectivity problem hindered the involvement of the majority of the students and faculty about the use of Facebook frequently. Overall, I this paper presents a boosting approach of AIOU towards the more educational use of social media.

Key words: Distance education, Mastery of Learning, Social Media, Facebook.

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Introduction

All aspects of human life have been influenced significantly by technology. Education is one of them, which directly affected by the use of technology. It has changed the conventional way of education into more modern and innovative methodologies. These technological based methodologies evolve modern educational theories and practices. While focusing the persistently changed global scenario, the value of web-based education has become the dire need of time for all societies. Pakistan is also making strenuous efforts to modernize the education system at all tiers through computer and internet technologies. For this purpose all schools, colleges and universities are replacing their traditional styles of instruction and learning with modern technologies. The extensive use of internet has changed practices of learners and they are considered active participants instead of their passive role. AIOU as mega university of Pakistan is also concentrating on the use of modern technologies as well as social networking. This technological based social networking or media, particularly Facebook is considered a valuable way to engage students and teachers regarding their education matters. Education is said a constantly evolving entity which is supported by Facebook. Which enables the teachers or students as users to participate in discussion forums globally. Keeping in view the important role of Facebook in teaching learning process the existing study intends to explore the effects of Facebook as a key aspect of social media. Overall, this study revolves around the key idea that to what extent the Facebook being as best practice optimizes the learning of AIOU students at a higher level of education.

Literature Review

Open learning and distance education refers to approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities. ODL at the tertiary level is offered by single-mode institutions, an increasing number of traditional universities, 'dual-mode' institutions, consortia of universities and virtual universities. In addition, recent years have seen the increasing emergence of new non-traditional providers of higher education such as private companies. ODL is delivered using a variety of print and electronic systems either through synchronous communication (learning in which all parties participate at the same time) or through asynchronous communication (learning in which parties participate at different times). The main systems are mediated by correspondence, audiovisual means (television and radio), multimedia (audio and text files), and the Internet (<http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php>).

The best way to define social media is to break it down. Media is an instrument of communication, like a newspaper or a radio, so social media would be a social of communication. Social Media is the future of communication, a countless array of internet based tools and platforms that increase and enhance the sharing of information. This new form of media makes the transfer of text, photos, audio, video, and information in general increasingly fluid among internet users. Social Media has relevance not only for regular internet users, but business as well (<http://www.socialmediadefined.com/what-is-social-media/>).

Social media technologies take on different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, videos, rating and social bookmarking. Kietzmann et al. Present a Social Media Honeycomb that defines how these Social Media differ according to the extent to which they focus on some of all of seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre (2011). By applying a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) Kaplan and Haenlein created a classification scheme in their Business Horizons (2010) article, with six different types of social media: collaborative projects (for example, Wikipedia), blogs and micro-blogs (for example, Twitter), Content Communities (for example, YouTube), social networking sites (for example, Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life). Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice over IP, to name a few. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms. Social media networking websites include sites like Facebook, Twitter, Bebo and MySpace.

According to Redecker, Mutka & Punic (2010) argued that studies conducted by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) recommended that the high take up of social media applications outside of formal educational settings provides new opportunities for innovating and modernizing Education and Training institutions and for preparing learners for the 21st century.

They further pointed out trends through which importance of social media can be analyzed:

- a) To use for advance communication services.
- b) To support the use of social media for knowledge exchange, information and learning purposes.
- c) To exchange audiovisual content (for leisure activities).
- d) To enhance learning and teaching opportunities.
- e) To provide potential support for technological, pedagogical and organizational innovation. Redecker et al. (2009) illustrates that social media can be, and is being used by educational and training institutions.
- f) Facilitate access by current and prospective students to information, making the institutional process more transparent and facilitating the distribution of educational material.
- g) Integrate learning in a wider community, reaching out to virtually meet people from other age group and socio-cultural backgrounds, linking to experts, researchers or practitioners in ascertains field of study and thus opening up alternative channels for gaining knowledge and enhancing skills.
- h) Support the exchange of knowledge and material and facilitate community building and collaboration among learners and teachers.
- i) Increase academic achievement with the help of motivating, personalized and engaging learning tools and environments.
- j) Implement pedagogical strategies intended to support, facilitate and improve learning process.

With the advent of the internet and networked technology in communication in the 21st century, the use of social media is ubiquitous especially among net generation. Social media have been used in a wide range of activities – starting from socializing with peer, keeping in touch with family and friends to using social media as a tool to advertize and promote products in business and marketing (Wankel, Charles, 2011).

According to Wankel, Charles (2009) widespread use of social media enhances activities in education, entertainment, politics, health industry, and business. Social media is an important tool in initiating an informal and active learning and teaching environment for both students and educators in higher education because learners can access large amount of information on social media while constructing peer to peer evaluation and discussion which focus on student- centered learning; the ability to use different social media tools which form a greater level of online learning experiences; the ability to save data and lecture using cloud computing technique, and most of all its affordability.

Kassens-Noor (2012) describes as: Many educators encourage instructors from higher education intuitions to apply and develop active learning practices exploiting the use of social media. In details, social media includes social networking websites such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and LinkedId; other Web 2.0 applications such as Wikis; and Video sharing website like YouTube, and blogging websites namely Blogspot and Word Press.

The popular social networking website, Facebook, catches a lot of attention from educators who want to use the site as tool since the discussion on the website encourages students to participate. According to the Wikipedia's Facebook information page (active December 31, 2011) and Infographic's Facebook User Statistics 2012, there are 845 million of Facebook users worldwide, and many of them are young people. *Wankel (2011)* points this out in his paper:

“Students using computer-mediated communication can have richer, more extensive exchanges than are likely in a face-to-face (F2F) classroom situation. This sometimes immersive experience can lead to more positive student attitudes and outcomes.”

As an example Wankel also suggests both instructors and students that anyone could initiate a discussion topic, and student can reply their thoughts and opinions on Facebook's Wall. By practicing this peer-to-peer discussion, he asserts that students can analysis topics and improve on the understanding of the subject for the students have already reviewed the related subject before they post their comments.

Design of Study

The nature of existing study was descriptive which comprised of survey. According to Kothari 1985 descriptive survey concerns with describing, recording, analyzing, and reporting conditions that exist or existed. So the existing survey concentrated to examine the use of Facebook as kind of social media in AIOU and analyze the challenges faced by the students of AIOU while using the Facebook. For conducting this survey a questionnaire was developed by addressing the following research questions:

- i. In what ways are students currently using Facebook as social media in their teaching and learning?
- ii. What are the factors promoting the use of Facebook among the students at Postgraduate level?
- iii. How will they foresee using social media in teaching and learning in the future?
- iv. To what degree is the level of Facebook self-efficacy of students related to their potential use of Social media teaching and learning?

Purposive sampling was used to select only those students of AIOU at postgraduate level who were using Facebook regarding their study program. Students' information was taken from the web page of AIOU and questionnaire was mailed and pasted on their Facebook. More than 3000 students from all disciplines of education of AIOU were using Facebook. All these students are using Facebook for their different purposes such as personal, educational, research and professional. For exploring the level of use of Facebook among students and tutors of AIOU sample was taken. For this purpose 200 students and 50 tutors registered at Ph.D, M.Phil and MS level in different programs of AIOU, using Facebook were taken purposefully for obtaining the opinions about the interactive, communicative and effective contribution of Facebook. Data collected through questionnaire was analyzed through percentage while focusing the following aspects:

1. Use of Facebook
2. Adoption of Facebook
3. Intended Use of Facebook
4. Use of Facebook for Educational Purposes

Data Overview

Sr. No	Responses	% of 50 tutors	% of 200 students
1	Every day log onto Facebook	78	90.5
2	1-5 hours a week to spend on Facebook	76	87.5
3	Academic input as the main purpose for using Facebook	34	47.5
4	Facebook is useful for resolving educational problems at AIOU	82	84.5
5	Educational problems are solved quickly through the use of Facebook	68	37.5
6	The response of AIOU concerned via Facebook is encouraging	43.5	46
7	Facebook is more economical to approach AIOU	78	86
8	Facebook increases your knowledge	74	83
9	Forms/Questionnaires/Polls/Educational discussion were added on Facebook	74	78
10	User as a part of the Facebook community	92	96.5
11	Facebook built up a relationship among course fellows	78	93.5
12	Facebook disseminated institutional activities timely	94	92
13	Facebook formed academic groups having common interests and needs	92	94.5
14	Facebook implemented group studies	78	89.5

Conclusions

For facilitating the learning of students and teaching of teachers how can Facebook help? To answer this central question of this study it was analyzed that to integrate the modern ways not only for games and chatting but for teaching and learning purposes. Facebook as a social media encourages the learner-centered approach. It also promotes social and informal learning venues, among the users. Through which intended outcomes can be achieved. Facebook as kind of social media is also known as informal and open learning venue. It also provides access for more information and experiences with the students and teachers. Overall, it was concluded that learning is superior to traditional content-centered education and use of Facebook is an open source of learning. For modernizing the human society and changing the habits of people towards innovations, social networks play an important role. The results of this study showed that Facebook as the social network is used extensively and actively by the students of AIOU. It is also concluded that students felt empowered during their educational activities. Due to the effective and frequent use of this social network mastery of learning comprises of creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, higher order thinking skills, cooperative learning and inquiry based learning were being developed among the students as well as teachers. Using Facebook provides the communication environment which is not restricted with space and time. Through this environment new opportunities may be occurred in obtaining more information, sharing experiences and solving personal and educational problems. It also develops communication skills and extends social interaction. The present study also shows that students of AIOU are facilitated by Facebook through delivery of information about institutional activities, events, policies and schedules of assignments and exams. Students also share their learning materials, presentations, research proposals, assignments and pictures. Due to the effective role of social networking in all aspects of our daily life, no one can ignore the use and effective role of Facebook. Overall all respondents unanimously agreed that Facebook was an effective medium; and everyone should get benefit from this tool.

Recommendations

The following are some recommendations for using the Facebook drawn from the data of this study:

- Encouraging the faculty and students for using Facebook as a tool through which they may be facilitated for informal and scholarly discussions.
- Encountering with obstacles to students and faculty at institutional level regarding the use of Facebook or any type of social media.
- Strategies may be designed for evaluating the reflections of students about their learning through Facebook.

- Faculty and students may be encouraged and motivated for more use of modern techniques of learning at institutional level.
- Though the use of Facebook by faculty and students of AIOU is not mandatory, but it is strongly recommended to include as an innovative learning approach in the academic calendar of AIOU. Training about the use of Facebook and its terms and condition may be provided to faculty and students.
- Institutional policies about the use of social media may also be formulated according to the ethical consideration of any type of media.

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