PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS TOWARDS USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSE

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Abstract: The effect of technology on human life is felt profusely through the advent of the internet. The ever-changing technology has also affected how people interrelate among themselves. The rise of internet technology saw the formation of virtual relationships, without having any personal association with a geographical area. In recent years, the emergence of social networking sites has spread extensively. The education system is also not free from the influence of social networking sites. This study reviews the extant literature on the use of social networking sites as an educational tool and explores the potential application of SNSs in the education context. 71 students were surveyed as to their current social network usage and their possible use of such sites in an educational setting. The survey results show mixed response but these findings help to correct and to frame a comprehensive educational set up when it comes to SNSs as the academic tool. Limitations, future scope and implications are drawn from the study.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites, Education, Pedagogy tools

INTRODUCTION

After industrial revolution if anything that has influenced the human life to a great extent, is nothing but internet technologies. Over the past decade the use of internet for communication purposes has been exponential. Technological advancement like personal computers and sophisticated internet softwares such as Internet explorer, Netscape, Google Chrome, Safari have made life easier for those who want to hang out in the world of websites. Tens and thousands of people are connecting themselves with their families and friends to the internet using their personal computer. There are number of internet chat rooms and new groups for those taking part in group discussion. People are also allowed to interact privately through the creation of personal chat rooms (Mckenna and Bargh, 2000). The number of users accessing the internet is ever increasing. Studies show that internet has become an indispensible part of emerging adults (Subramanyam et al, 2008). In recent years, the growth

and development of online social networking sites has been extensive and far reaching (Holcomb, Brady, and Smith, 2010). Right from their inception, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) for example Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter have drawn attention of millions of users; many are addicted to these sites at least once a day. As of now, there are hundreds of SNSs with varied technological preferences and offering a wide variety of services to its end users (Boyd and Ellison, 2008). Many SNSs provide features like creating personal profile, sharing information with others, uploading photographs, videos, other digital content and networking (Boyd and Ellison, 2008) which can be utilized for various academic and non academic purposes.

A study (University of Minnesota, 2008) found that students using online social networking sites are actually practicing the kinds of 21st century skills to be successful today in the competitive world. Students are motivated to develop and design their own layout. This change in

attitude of students towards the use of social networking sites can be viewed as a healthy trend in the education context. Sometimes social networking sites (SNSs) offer more than just social fulfillment or personal networking (University of Minnesota, 2008) but also offer tremendous educational potential and have implications for educators. With the growing popularity of SNSs, the educators have a vast opportunity to support what students are learning from the websites.

The present study reviews the extant literature in the field of social networking sites and suggests implications for the educators to tap the available potential and opportunities of these websites which can help schools and colleges to adopt some of the tools in the relevant manner and help inform the educational community of how best the use of SNSs will further enhance the learning and teaching process.

RELEVANT REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ridings and Gefen (2004) studied empirically the attraction of people on the virtual community and the reasons behind people joining such web-based virtual communities. They found that people join such communities to exchange information and social support. Broader use of internet indicated both search for friendship and entertainment act as motivational forces. Another reason people find interesting to participate in virtual communities is the recreation and adventure these websites provide. The methodology adopted is survey response. Findings from this study suggested that very few communities gave statistics about the size of their membership and the main reason why people join a specific virtual community is for information and knowledge exchange.

Supporting functions of social software to students and staff, beyond the classroom mode of education and reaching around the world for teaching, learning and communication (Bryant, 2006) described the various internet tools that extend the discussion beyond the classroom studies and provide new ways for students to collaborate and communicate within their class and around the world. (Bryant, 2006) also gives the example of Dickinson College where it has implemented two of the best-known tools, wiki and the blog. The ability to create link between people without physical space offers

tremendous opportunities for academic and non academic purposes. The article further explains that with the increasing popularity of SNSs, the opportunities to extend the classroom will certainly increase as these technologies continue to integrate and expand.

Boyd and Ellison (2008) investigated the definition, history and the scholarship of SNSs. According to them, SNSs are web-based services that allow individuals to create, share and traverse their list of connections made by them within the system in a public or semi-public profile. The nature of connections varies from one site to another. The first registered social networking site launched in 1997, SixDegrees.com that allowed users to create personal profiles, list their Friends. They have found over a decade hundreds of SNSs with varied features started offering services to their users for free of cost. They have also argued that currently there is no reliable data available to ascertain regarding how many people use SNSs. Scholarship concerning the implications of SNS use with regard to schools, universities, and libraries for example how students feel about having professors on Facebook and how faculty participation affects the student-professor relations. They have also found that there is nothing educational about SNSs except copy/past attitude on popular SNSs as form of social skills. However, their study serves as foundations to understand the long term implications of SNSs.

College students are well connected and interact with their peers using the available technology that sometimes change the way of relationship (Junco, Reynol and Cole-Avent, Gail A., 2008) among the students. The uses of technology help students engage with their educational institution, enhance their learning, improve their academic experiences, and explore the psychological affairs. Students adapt very easily to changes in technology. The authors argue that the modern day students expect faculty to use newer technologies to connect with them and use other technological media to deliver the goods in teaching and learning.

Dalsgaard (2008) discusses the question what are the pedagogical potentials of social networking sites? User generated information and collaboration act as major credentials of Web 2.0 technologies. The article argues about a central characteristic of social networking sites

such as Bebo, Facebook, MySpace and Ning comprise of personalization and socialization. This combination provides transparency to the students and the transparency gives students insight into each other's work. Further, it is argued that the personal work shared by the students shall be made available to others for example notes, links, bookmarks etc can be utilized in university education system too.

Duffy and Bruns (2006) focused on the educational possibilities of blogs, wikis and RSS feeds. These technologies help desirable practices such as collaborative content creation, evaluation of student work, content development, peer assessment, individual and group reflection on learning experiences. Each technology has pragmatic suggestions for incorporation into the student learning experience. The paper also highlights the educational benefits and uses of Really Simple Syndication (RSS). Lecturers and students can keep track of favorite websites from one convenient location. They can also notify of updates from many websites that are relevant to the course or program from time to time. This is very efficient use of time and useful prompt for further rethinking of teaching practices.

The impact of social networking tool and Web 2.0 on education has been much talked about (English and Duncan-Howell, 2008). Teachers play an important role in promoting Web 2.0 and other social networking tools to meet the needs of their students. Tertiary educational institutions engaged in imparting quality education to its students are beginning to recognize the importance of these tools. The paper explores the use of social networking tools particularly Facebook, to support students undertaking teaching in the field of practical courses at Queensland University of Technology. The students were habitual user of Facebook, and group page was created to examine their experiences and behaviors during their teaching practicum. The results showed that the digital behaviors and the habits of students registered in the tertiary courses can be used in formulating, designing and developing supportive tools that can be used during the practical application of a theory, especially one which helps the students to gain hands on experience.

Harris, Kandage (2008) explained the fact that for some college students, SNSs such MySpace and Facebook

have become one of the important means of communication. Universities and colleges recognized this phenomenon of SNSs and have begun to think about how to foster connective power of SNSs to further engage students in academic life. On the other hand, Professors are also starting to use SNS to assist students in their day to day academic life and build a healthy teacher-student relationship. However this new relationship has raised questions whether Professors should be allowed to welcome in the student-only spaces. Further, recruitment measures also include SNS to e-recruit students. The recruiters can access the personal information of the aspirants from the SNSs before taking them into the organization.

Holcomb, Lori B., Brady, Kevin P., Smith, Bethany V. (2010) opined that educational fraternity has been slow in adopting the social networking technologies into the classroom curriculum due to privacy and safety concerns for students. However, they have studied that Non-commercial and safe SNSs like Ning provide an exciting and innovative alternative for educators. The students' privacy and safety issues can also be addressed properly. The results from the study provide that a majority of students like to use non commercial and e-safe SNSs for e-learning benefits in their courses. These results can help the educational community of how to best use SNSs to further improve learning through the use of SNSs.

Huijser (2008) explores potential educational applications of new technological development Web 2.0. It cuts the unnecessary hype created around the technologies and also around the dimensions of Generation Y and their implications for learning and teaching. This paper, driven by sound pedagogical principles and empirical research, explains the Web 2.0 technologies, particularly SNSs, while focusing on the opportunities available in the educational applications of these technologies. If students are to be effected with some meaningful learning experiences, these technological innovations need to be evaluated carefully.

Ophus and Abbit (2009) in their project studied the feasibility of using social networking sites, facebook in particular, as an aide for a biology content course for elementary education at Midwestern University. The survey method was adopted and gave favorable results

in the initial survey which was conducted on 110 students as to their current social network usage and their possible use of those sites in the educational setting. Thought the benefits of the tools of social networking for teaching and learning remain unknown, largely. But the study demonstrated that the students are receptive to the possible uses of Facebook. Now the idea is to discover whether the same technology can assist students' learning better. This study has given direction to explore the benefit by focusing on probing the degree to which students are able to tradeoff between the social and academic uses of SNSs like Facebook.

Pempek, Tiffany A., Yermolayeva, Yevdokiya A., Calvert, Sandra L (2009) in their article have looked at the questions about how much, why and how the contemporary young adults use social networking sites. A follow up survey was conducted on 92 undergraduates who completed a diary-like measure each day for a week. At the end of the week, results indicated that students use Facebook approximately 30 min throughout the day as part of their daily routine, irrespective of their busy schedule. SNSs provide new venue for young adults to express themselves and to interact with one another.

Dawley, Lisa (2009) has studied and identified the dynamics of an emerging type of teaching and learning called as social network knowledge construction. Social networking technologies lay emphasis on thinking process and development of future consciousness, new pedagogies, apart from the way individuals interact with one and another, share and learn things. The paper discussed the potential use of SNSs in the teaching and learning process. Pedagogical frame is also identified with the help of SNSs. Attention towards the training of faculty on how to use the technology but also how to integrate it effectively into the course and curriculum development would enhance the learning experience. With the integration of strategy and technology, faculty and students can provide a base for exploring the realm of SNSs.

Based on the above literature review, the debate that concerns the use of social networking systems in educational environment is nothing but the knowledge that students are already heavily connected in using social networking sites. The question of whether social networking tools should be employed in learning

environments is better characterized as a question of repurposing an existing technology for teaching and learning. It is quite possible to begin to use a social networking system in a variety of ways in a pre degree and above level courses system; it is of equal importance to find out the feasibility dimensions of such effort and also to explore how students may respond to such an effort.

The very purpose of this study is to explore and examine the student usage patterns and perceptions of the social networking technology in an academic setting in order to provide a foundation for the development of meaningful social networking activities to be explored in future research. Therefore, this study sought to address the following questions:

- To what degree are students currently using social networking systems for personal communication and activities relating to academic course work?
- What is the perception of students in integrating a social networking system with a various academic courses?

METHODS

The design of the study is to examine in detail the benefits associated with using SNSs in Education given its privacy and security. In addition to that the current study proposes to furnish details on how an education-based SNS can be utilized for teaching and learning.

Seventy one undergraduate engineering students (N=71) were surveyed. The survey was administered in paper form to the participants. The survey requested basic demographic data regarding the academic status and level of the participants and also contained items regarding the frequency of use of a social networking system and the frequency of use when communicating with four categories of social groups (e.g. friends, family, other students, instructors). Additionally, the survey asked about the likelihood of participating in nine types of activities that have been described by other research and popular media as possible academic uses of social networking systems. The survey also included eight Likert-scale items regarding the student perceptions and preferences concerning multiple aspects of social networking in an academic setting.

Since the study sought information relevant to the future development of academic activities that integrate social networking technology, much of the data analysis was descriptive and conducted using SPSS statistical analysis software.

While addressing the degree to which students currently used social networking systems for personal communication and activities related to academic course work, the survey items regarding the frequency of use and communication with various social groups were most relevant. The perception of the value of social networking technology was assessed using; survey items regarding student perceptions and preferences; survey items in which student rated the likelihood of participation in various activities.

RESULTS

With regard to use of the social networking site, a large majority (95.5%) of respondents indicated that they used SNS either daily, or multiple times each day.

Table 1
Frequency of SNS use (N = 71)

	Frequency	*Percentage (%)*
Never	1	1.4%
Monthly	2	2.8%
Weekly	3	4.2%
Daily	24	33..8%
Multiple times per day	41	57.7%

Table 2
Frequency of Types of Communication using Social Networking Technology

	Never	*Very little*	*Some- times*	*Freq- uently*
Communicating with friends	.9%	0%	11.8%	87.3%
Communicating with family	5.5%	22.7%	52.7%	19.1%
Communicating with other students in your courses	5.5%	17.3%	53.6%	23.6%
Communicating with instructors	85.5%	11.8%	2.7%	0%

As can be seen in Table 2, communication with friends was the most common type of communication activity, followed by communication with family. Most of the respondents (85.5%) indicated that they had never used SNS to communicate with an instructor, though most (77.3%) has used SNS to communicate with other students in their courses.

Data regarding the likelihood of participating in various academic uses of SNS indicate that participants were most likely to use a social networking system to communicate with other students in the class. In general, a majority of students were likely to participate in most of the activities suggested. However, ratings of the likelihood of participation were lowest for using SNS to "Communicate with Instructors" and "Using online discussions tools that included both instructor and students." The highest ratings were in response to the "Access course notes and other materials," "Viewing course schedule," "Communicating with other students in my courses," and "Joining a Facebook group for students in your courses."

Table 3
Frequency of responses to likelihood of participation in course-related social networking activities

	I would not participate	*I might participate*	*I would likely participate*	*I would definitely participate*
Course notes and other materials	3.6%	10%	41.8%	44.5%
Viewing course schedule	0.9%	16.4%	35.5%	47.3%
Communicating with instructors	6.4%	37.3%	38.2%	18.2%
Communicating with other students in my courses	0.9%	3.6%	40%	55.5%
Using online discussions tools that included both instructor and students	3.7%	32.1%	45%	19.3%
Using online discussion tools that included ONLY other students (without instructor)	2.7%	18.2%	54.5%	24.5%
Using SNSs quizzes relating to my courses	13.6%	20%	36.4%	30%
Using SNS games that related to course material	10.9%	22.7%	33.6%	32.7%
Joining a SNS group for students in the courses	1.8%	20%	32.7%	45.5%

Overall, participants responded favorably to the degree to which a social networking system could be used as an academic tool, with the greatest benefit coming in the form of increased communication among students.

Questions regarding the uses of SNS as an educational tool for higher education students were scored on a 4-point Likert Scale from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (4). Most participants thought SNS would be useful in their courses (M=3.24, s= 0.620), and could specifically improve communication among students in courses (M=3.27, s= 0.585) and between students and professors (M=3.20, s= 0.600). Participants did not have a strong preferences for SNSs over Web Course Tools discussion tools (M=3.20, s= 0.576). The respondents also did not have strong agreement with the item that the use of Facebook in a course would be a distraction (M=3.14, s= 0.495).

Table 4
Average ratings of student opinions of social networking as an academic tool
(1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree)

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
I think SNSs can be useful in my courses	71	1	4	3.24	.620
I think SNSs can improve communication between students and instructors	71	1	4	3.20	.600
I think SNSs can improve communication among students in a course	71	2	4	3.27	.585
I think SNSs can be used to help students collaborate in higher education courses	71	2	4	3.42	.625
I would prefer to use SNSs in my courses rather than Web Course Tools	71	2	4	3.20	.576
I do NOT want to use SNSs in any of my courses	71	1	4	3.38	.618
I think SNSs would be a distraction in higher education courses	71	3	4	3.14	.495
I would create a separate account in SNSs for use in my courses	71	2	4	3.24	.547

DISCUSSION

The data collected in the study suggest that the respondents were largely supportive of using a social networking system in their courses. However, the responses also suggest that some activities are more likely than others to be valued by the students.

Few respondents have reported that they are currently using social networking sites for college tasks. In some cases, this appeared to be an intentional separation of college and social lives and in other cases this was simply due to the fact that social networking is not a common tool for course work at this time. The survey data illustrate that use of SNSs for communication with classmates occurs less frequently than communication with family and friends. Using social networking to communicate with an instructor happens seldom. As SNSs are social technology, these results are not surprising and do not necessarily diminish the potential for academic uses of social networking systems. However, one cannot deny the fact that academic uses of social networking has not emerged as a common use, even within an academic institution, should be a reason to carefully consider whether students perceive a necessary separation of college and social life.

Some are currently using social networking systems for academic purposes, many students found potential benefits to their course work. Most of the reported potential benefits were regarding the ease and convenience of communicating via these SNSs. In response to the survey items where students were asked to rate the likelihood that they would participate in several types of activities available in social networking systems, in all cases a majority of respondents said they would "like participate" or they would "definitely participate." However, there was a notable disparity in responses to the likelihood of communicating with an instructor via SNSs with only a few of them willing to participate.

The survey data suggest that there is notable potential for social networking systems as an instructional and educational tool as well as notable concerns.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It is well known that the popularity of social networking sites is undeniable and the educational applications of this technology remain in question. The essential question is whether popularity of social networking systems can be the force for effective integration into education. Student perceptions of these activities will be one key to their success and maintaining a focus on student perception as we seek to investigate the impact of these tools on learning styles, social presence, technology acceptances, and other facets known to lead toward academic achievement will help researchers develop effective instructional strategies. Future research can also benefit by focusing on investigating the degree to which student are able to negotiate between the social and academic uses of SNSs.

IMPLICATIONS

The following are some of the probable implications that can be derived from this study.

SNSs act as powerful communication platform at providing an easy mechanism and access through which huge number of people can communicate via short messages, discussions and media sharing. The same features can be easily adapted for educational purposes and use these tools with which the students are already aware of.

The study allows highlights the professional distance between the students and the instructors. Some students found it to be ok to share online information with their instructors while other students view their privacy is being threatened. This should be allowed to be student-initiated. It is also very much likely that the students will be more accepting of social networking systems for teaching and learning when they perceive that their privacy is not at risk or threatened. For this purpose, the profiles can be designed in such a way that without opening the private information of the students the academic activities can be handled.

CONCLUSION

The debate over the use of SNSs in educational setting as part of teaching and learning is being studied. Despite bans on the use of SNSs in some schools over the issue of privacy and safety, recent studies detailing the potential educational value of adopting e-safe SNSs as an important alternative to commercial SNSs in educational settings.

Findings from the study highlight the educational value of SNSs in educational setting which in turn foster the learning so that educational community will be more likely to incorporate them into the course curriculum.

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APPENDIX – A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

I am currently conducting a survey on '**Students' Perceptions towards Use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) for Academic Purpose.'**

I am curious to know about to what extent the students currently using social networking systems for personal communication and activities relating to academic course work.

Please help me by filling out this questionnaire. All information will be treated in confidential and results will be produced only in the form of aggregated data.

Thank you for your time and help.

A.

Please encircle the number, **1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree**

1.	I think SNSs can be useful in my courses	1	2	3	4
2.	I think SNSs can improve communication between students and instructors	1	2	3	4
3.	I think SNSs can improve communication among students in a course	1	2	3	4
4.	I think SNSs can be used to help students collaborate in higher education courses	1	2	3	4
5.	I would prefer to use SNSs in my courses rather than Web Course Tools	1	2	3	4
6.	I do NOT want to use SNSs in any of my courses	1	2	3	4
7.	I think SNSs would be a distraction in higher education courses	1	2	3	4
8.	I would create a separate account in SNSs for use in my courses	1	2	3	4

B.

Please encircle the number, **1 = I would not participate, 2 = I might participate, 3 = I would likely participate, 4 = I would definitely participate**

I would be interested in:

1.	Accessing course notes and other materials	1	2	3	4
2.	Viewing course schedule	1	2	3	4
3.	Communicating with instructors	1	2	3	4
4.	Communicating with other students in my courses	1	2	3	4
5.	Using online discussions tools that included both instructor and students	1	2	3	4
6.	Using online discussion tools that included ONLY other students (without instructor)	1	2	3	4
7.	Using SNSs quizzes relating to my courses	1	2	3	4
8.	Using SNSs games that related to course material	1	2	3	4
9.	Joining a SNSs group for students in the courses	1	2	3	4

C.

Please encircle the number, 1 **= Never, 2 = Very little, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently**

I am happy in:

10.	Communicating with friends	1	2	3	4
11.	Communicating with family	1	2	3	4
12.	Communicating with other students in the courses	1	2	3	4
13.	Communicating with instructors	1	2	3	4

Name (Optional): ……………………..   Age……   Gender: M/F

Course…………