

Social Media: A Neo Form of Learning Platform

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Abstract

“Can social media be considered a neo-form of learning platform for students in this globalized digital world?” Social media is not only used for communication and entertainment purposes but is also highly popular among students for collaboration and learning purposes. This paper aims to explore how social media has evolved into a neo-form of learning platform, enabling students to acquire diverse knowledge to enhance their academic and professional careers. The primary source for this exploration is a review of existing literature, supplemented by personal experiences and relevant examples to support the claim. The discussion on why social media serves as a beneficial learning platform revolves around four major themes: its student-centric learning approach, its ability to enhance personal learning environments, its promotion of flexible and inclusive learning, and its role as a milestone for information and communication in academics and professional careers. In conclusion, the analysis confirms that social media is indeed becoming an effective neo-learning platform for students.

Keywords: social media, collaborative learning, sharing information, personal learning

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Introduction

Social networks are pervasive all over the world. Social media users in 2021 were 4.26 billion worldwide and the number is projected to increase to almost six billion in 2027 (Statista, 2023). Nowadays, social networks incessantly influence the life of young people. As a teacher, I have personally experienced that social media in higher education is like a place where students can easily talk to their teachers, classmates, and access lots of study materials. Among all the young people using social media, students are a significant group. With social media, students have changed the way they use the web for retrieving information to creating and sharing information with their peers over the internet (Shittu et al., 2011, as cited in Panekham, 2014). So, the influence of social media on the education sector cannot be overemphasized. In my thinking, the use of social media on academic learning process improves student's learning opportunities, foster collaborative studies and group discussion, allows communication outside the classroom, and enhance critical thinking. However, we cannot ignore the negative effect of social media if it is used inappropriately. But the focus of the study is to discuss the positive impact of it on students' learning phenomenon.

What is social media? The definition may seem different for different researchers. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), social media tools are online apps that let people create and share their own content. So, it is like using the internet to connect with others and get support from them. More clearly, Panekham (2014) has defined social media sites into four distinct categories. They are social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn), media sharing sites (YouTube and Flickr), content creation and publishing tools (wikis and blogs) and internet messaging (Google Hangout, Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger). So, we can say that social media includes different communication tools like Blogs, projects that people work on together, social networking sites, places where people share content, and virtual worlds or game worlds.

Learning in this study is taken as formal learning (text-book oriented) and informal learning (skill oriented) of students. Thus, changing learning style through social media needs to be accepted as a new form of learning model. What is neo-learning? Still, developing country like Nepal, learning is more focused on a classroom learning where teachers give lecture and students listen. However, learning paradigms have already changed and are moving towards e-learning through different platforms (Wikramanayake, 2003). So, this study considers neo-learning as a changing paradigm shift of learning from classroom learning to web based e-learning through social media. Craig (2007) also highlighted that the flexible nature of Web 2.0 (social media) services has changed learning style into new horizon where students are encouraged to think critically and analytically, as well as find resources to solve real world problems. In this context, we can argue that social media are equally competent to groom anyone from the learning perspectives like another e-learning platform. Likewise, Siddhartha et al. (2020) have said that in today's world, we can't stop people from using social media because it helps them grow and succeed in life in many ways.

Given the popularity of social media used by students, many higher educational institutions have been hovering around the use of social media by lecturers and students. For example, Indonesian Christian University has chosen social media platforms to share study materials and assignments with students after

outbreak of COVID -19 (Nadeak, 2020). Similarly, study of Dalili and Dastain (2020) has found that social media has been used to share viewpoints and distance learning during the COVID-19 crisis. Why in pandemic period only? We can continue our learning via social media any time. I had personally experienced how social media contributed to my academic learning in higher education. We were sharing our reading materials, knowledge, and views through social media in peer learning approach which, I feel, really enhanced my academic learning. Likewise, the education policy of Nepal 20 (policy no. 9.24) has also highlighted the importance of digital education and distance learning for quality education. To support this policy, social media can be a good contributor in the learning achievement for the students. In this context, social media could be an effective tool for educational purposes which has received recent attention from all stakeholders. At the same time, this developing arena is receiving an increased research interest.

The potential role of social media as a facilitator and enhancer of learning is worth investigating. Thus, the major argument of this paper is that social media enhances student's learning efficiency because it adopts students' centric learning approach enhancing personal learning environment. It promotes flexible and inclusive learning, delivering healthy and swift information and communication among students for academic and career development.

Social Media and Learning Approach

Digital learning theory refers to the study of how people learn and engage with digital media and technology. It includes how people process and retain information from digital sources, how they interact with and communicate through digital platforms, and how they can effectively use digital tools to achieve their learning goals. Under digital learning theory, social learning theory suggests that people learn through social interactions, and that these interactions are critical for the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, but it depends on influencing factors like, context, culture, community and learner's characteristics in teaching and learning (Hill et al., 2009). Social interactions, culture of using social media, self – motivation and adoptability of social media are crucial to enhance knowledge and skills. In today's digital world, learning is no longer something people do alone. Instead, learners gather information from various digital platforms by combining social learning with social web platforms (Chen & Bryer, 2012). They continuously seek out information to solve problems or satisfy their curiosity while studying. Learning whenever you need has become a way of life in our modern society (Shah & Bhattarai, 2023). Social media platforms connect people free of cost and facilitate the sharing of information in different formats. The study of Liccardi et al. (2007) broached up the issue that students are socially connected through social software and share their daily learning experiences on several topics among their friends. Thus, social media applications are becoming popular among students and have positive effects on students' e-learning as a new learning platform.

Likewise, cooperative learning is widely recognized as a pedagogical practice that promotes socialization and learning among students (Gillies, 2016). I believe that this type of cooperative learning practices are possible on different social media sites like Facebook, Viber etc. For example, Davidovitch and Belichenko (2018) conducted an empirical research survey to examine satisfaction among students taking part in a collaborative Facebook group and how collaborative Facebook groups influence student's

achievement. The research revealed a strong positive correlation exists between student's participation in a collaborative Facebook group and learning achievement. As per the study, we can design collaborative Facebook group for educational purposes and encourage students to take part in the group for their learning achievement. In my view, it is possible to get significant contribution of Facebook on student's success and satisfaction, where the concern of many stakeholders is surrounded only on Facebook addiction. However, we need to accept the reality that social media is becoming one of the emerging learning platforms in the changing digital world.

Methodology

This paper has reviewed literature to understand how well social media supports students' learning. Together with literature review, examples of students and my self-reflection are the strength to validate arguments of the study. As I have been a professional teacher for the last 20 years, I consider my personal experience is not weaker than the current literatures.

Four different themes have been utilized to establish social media as a neo learning platform. The first theme is social media takes student's centric learning approach. In students' centered learning, students can achieve higher levels of success by using technology and working on group projects that motivate them to go beyond their comfort zone and accomplish the tasks they have chosen to pursue (Overby, 2011). The study of Kohle & Caevas (2010) found that social media tools are enhancing student centered learning and engagement, which is more advanced form than that of traditional lecture method in classroom. Hence, a student's centric learning approach can be taken as a neo form of learning approach. Similarly, the second theme is social media enhance personal learning environment. In traditional lecture- dominated teaching, students are treated as objects being taught, and they often end up being passive listeners who just receive information. They are not actively engaged as the main participants in the learning process (Khadka & Bhattarai, 2021). This teaching method is highly susceptible to distractions, meaning students may lose focus or interest easily. So, personal learning environment can be considered as better neo technique of learning. Likewise, the third theme 'flexible and inclusive learning through social media' is also the traits of modern learning where students enjoy their learning as per their choice and time. It is missing in traditional class lecture teaching. So, flexibility and inclusiveness are also pointing towards innovative approach of learning in modern era. Finally, the last theme 'information and communication' is the trademark of social media. But the history of social media is not long for us. Therefore, the exchange of knowledge and skills through social media as a part of information and communication from one person to another person is still a new learning approach for us. In conclusion, all four themes are pointing towards neo learning platform of social media.

Social Media Takes Students' Centric Learning Approach

Different social media sites have different dynamic features which anyone can experience by using them comprehensibly. Many researchers and users are accepting the fact that social Medias can be blended in our traditional education system (lecture method in class) for quality education which enhances learning out comes of students. Boateng & Amankwaa (2016) asserted that social media has had an impact on instructors, students, and other academic members, bringing them together to collaborate and enhance

knowledge building in teaching and learning. I am personally observing that my daughter, who is in class six, is improving her studies by using different lectures video on YouTube if she missed her regular class at school or if she is unclear about topic from teacher. From last two years, not only me, but her teachers also talk about her academic improvement and applause her learning style from social media. The study from Kamnoetsin (2014) found that the Facebook platform assisted students in developing their grammar, vocabulary, and writing, as it helped them share information and acquire new knowledge. Thus, it can be said that social media could be an effective tool for students to engage in their academic activities with good flavor of student' centric learning approach.

The paper of Tayo et al. (2019) opines that people mostly use social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and You Tube for socializing, getting information, and academic purposes. The perception towards social media may not be the same for all. It depends upon the choice of individual how they use it. The question is, does social media have potential to increase students' learning environment? For example, a study by Ratneswary and Rasiah (2014) revealed that, in a student-centered learning environment, Facebook was seen as a creative and useful tool that improve students' educational experiences. It made the subject matter more meaningful and encouraged effective collaboration among students and teachers. The approach of student-centered learning fosters an active atmosphere where students feel comfortable sharing their knowledge with teacher and classmates. After feedback, students can get more knowledge on the subject matters. This is my view which I experienced in the virtual classes of my higher studies at Kathmandu University.

I witnessed the personal experience of one of my students, Ramesh Bista (pseudonym), who shared how he became a successful business-person by selling milk products like paneer, butter and curd in the local market within two to three years. Five years ago, he was an ordinary master's degree student in business studies (MBS) at my college where I taught. Due to his family's economic situation, he had to work hard and was frequently absent from classes to support them. However, his friends informed me that he excelled at using social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube, where he shared his creative thoughts. His cousin brother criticized Ramesh's passion for using social media, arguing that he should focus more on reading books instead. The faculty also shared this concern, fearing that his social media use might hinder his academic performance. Surprisingly, Ramesh achieved good grades in his final exams, leaving us astonished. When we asked him about his success, he smiled and explained his unique learning style. He would take photos of class notes from his friends via Facebook messenger and Viber when he was absent, or if needed, have group discussions with them through video calls to clarify doubts. Additionally, he used You Tube videos to supplement his understanding of various study topics. Next, Ramesh attributed his successful dairy business to the creative advertisements he conducted through Facebook and You Tube. He believed that the fusion of marketing knowledge from books and social media platforms turned him into a creative thinker and established him as an entrepreneur. His inspiring story really struck my mind and forced me to think of the digital way of teaching learning methodology. Considering Ramesh's experience, I found the answer to the question of whether social media could positively contribute to students' learning achievements. The answer is a definite yes. Social media has the potential to become a neo-form of student-centered learning in today's digitally globalized world.

Social Media Enhances Personal Learning Environment

Learning can be achieved in society without formal schools and teachers. I learnt this lesson from the story of Hindu great epic, Mahabharat where the knowledge achieved by one of the character (Eklabya) without guru (Teacher) was of high quality than the knowledge gained by his opponent (Arjun) from formal guru, Great Doodacharya. This story really struck my mind and I was searching the answer- "Is it possible in this world?", where majority of education systems are shrinking under the exchange of knowledge between teacher and students. The story of Ramesh also indicates about personal learning environment embedded in social media. Now, I am convinced that social media can play the role of educator for the personal learning environment. According to Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012), Personal learning Environment (PLE) is a teaching method with great potential for combining formal and informal learning through social media. It also helps students take charge of their own learning in higher education settings. The authors have found a strong link between PLE, social media, and self-regulated learning. They suggest that social media can utilized to create PLEs that support students in regulating their own learning process. I have several examples of self-learning in my life which are from good contribution of social media. A few days back, I was struggling to shut down my computer because the mouse of the computer was not working. I didn't have knowledge to shut down the computer without mouse by using shot cut key of key-board. But, in the meantime, I learnt the process of doing shutdown through YouTube, not by any physical instructor. Thus, I am convinced that social media can create a personal learning environment.

Is it possible to get teachers everywhere for us at a time of problem? If we are searching for a human teacher, then it may work. But, if we are searching for solutions, it may not be true. With the help of virtual teachers (social media), it is possible because billions of information are there. People who are learning always look for information to solve a problem at work, school, or simply because they are curious. They use digital technologies and the internet not just to find information but also to share what they know with others. McGloughlin and Lee (2010) say that learners shouldn't be seen as just receiving information passively; instead, they actively help, create and share content. Thus, we should note that, not only self-learning opportunities, but social media has also provided us with the platform of demonstrating creative creations to the world. McGloughlin and Lee further argue that learning in the context of social media has become highly self-motivated, autonomous, and informal. So, to taste the savor of PLE of social media, students need to internalize themselves that it is a good platform of neo learning approach to enrich their learning experiences.

Social Media Promotes Flexible and Inclusive Learning

The basic human nature is that they want to lead a life in a more flexible way and they are tending to search flexible solution of any problem. In fact, as an educational tool, Kolan and Dzandza (2018) point out that social media enriches learning by giving both students and teachers the opportunity to connect in new and very exciting ways thereby encouraging flexible mode of learning. The study further explains that flexible learning expands the choice on what, when and how people learn. So, a flexible learning approach of social media reduces the stress of students since they can study in their convenient environment.

Social media can create an indirect flexible environment inside the class if all learning peers are connected through the world of it. Students are taking advantage of social media incorporated in class, displaying higher relationship with their peers in comparison to their counterparts who are not. According to a study (Jackson, 2011), students are enabled by social media to categorize themselves with similar peers and to enhance and connect with them. Moreover, it also decreases the diversity in the classroom via a neutral zone wherein students can interact with their peers. More importantly, students' engagement in social media has emotional connection with their peers as they feel that they may get help from them in the case they need to. These peer linkages encourage the participation of all students, specifically those who are hesitant to discuss matters face-to-face. Thus, social media promotes inclusive learning pedagogy. More and more, we can see social media being used in higher education. Instructors are turning to technology to improve their teaching and encourage students to engage actively in their learning process (Tess, 2013). In my teaching career, I have observed that class is more active if students are connected in some group of social media than those classes of students who are less active in social media group. Thus, it can be said that social media enhances the conducive learning environment of the classes with flexible and inclusive learning mode.

Not all students join school or college because of their interest or economic condition or availability of institutions. In such cases, social media can play a constructive role in disseminating knowledge through online platforms. Many students quit college and fail to graduate not because of economic factors, but because they find college uninteresting (Carnes, 2011). These students need to be motivated (Bhattarai, 2015). The idea of bringing distracted students from formal schooling education to open online courses increase the quality and knowledge horizon of students. Carey (2012) feels that MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) will change the future of higher education. The study finds that MIT, Harvard, and Berkeley are offering free MOOCs via edX, a not-for-profit venture. The free online courses through social media could be helpful to those students who are unable to continue their study due to poor economic condition and have zeal to study. Moreover, this neo learning approach in education sector fulfill the gap created by traditional institutionalized learning pedagogy and more inclined towards students' choice and well-being. I believe that if we create a healthy environment for effective free online courses through social media in poor communities and educationally marginalized group in the world, lots of people get benefitted from it.

The virtual mode of teaching is the only effective strategy of teaching in pandemic situations like COVID-19 where most of the educational institutions are closed and millions of students all around the globe are deprive of learning (UNICEF, 2020). As per the report of UNICEF, social media can be a good contributor to continue the learning of students where the traditional classroom learning is completely halted. Nadeak's (2020) study investigated how effective distance learning through social media is, and the results showed that it works well for both theoretical and practical courses. Thus, it can be concluded that social media may be a nice effective alternative tool for unavoidable circumstances. So, it can be called a flexible and inclusive way of learning platform.

Social Media: Milestone for Information and Communication

Social media is a group of websites and online systems where lots of people can interact, chat, and share things with each other within a network (Murphy et al., 2014). Advocates of mass communication and journalism claim that when there is continuous flow of information from one part to another part of the world, knowledge will transfer automatically in all part of world as a means of information, as they consider information is a good knowledge to the society. Several types of social media play different roles with one main purpose, which is to disseminate information on an urgent basis and share it with a wide range of people. During a crisis, it's crucial to carefully plan how to respond and share information on social media in a strategic way. This helps manage the information effectively and prevents the crisis from escalating further (Derania & Naidup, 2015). In a pandemic situation of COVID -19 also, we all witnessed that social media played the constructive role to disseminate correct information and knowledge swiftly to the society that people were aware in short time and able to learn about corona virus. According to Hashim et al. (2020), students took the initiative to verify information and demonstrate a desire to share credible and right information with their family and friends through social media. This study can be manipulated as how much students are informed in social media and their communication practice of right information.

Social media can assist in enhancing academic performance of students as well as researchers if lecturers and supervisors integrate social media in their teaching methods (Al-Rahim, 2015). I do completely agree on it as we can collect lots of information for research through social media. During the journey of MPhil at Kathmandu university, I have personally used pile of information through social media to make my research work excellent. Moreover, I feel that how important the literacy of social media is important in our educational pursuit. Nagel et al. (2018) focused their study to understand student's social media platform and found that Facebook and Instagram are most popular social sites for graduate and post graduate students. The key argument of the research was that it is especially important for educators to know about current and required knowledge of the students in order to enhance students' academic excellence. For this, educators need to be familiar with the students' existing social media habits before dealing with their course. As per this empirical research, students demanded social media in their curriculum, and they believed that social media literacy is important for their academic as well as professional career. In this perspective, my understanding is that students are aware of social media, but they are struggling to use social media in their academic as well as professional life due to the lack of enough knowledge.

The theory of education focuses not only on knowledge but also on how to incorporate knowledge in professional careers to earn money for livelihood. So, business professionalism is one of the key issues for management students. As per the study of Wecker (2012), no discussion of social networks is complete without a look at LinkedIn, the business social networking site which helps students to search job through LinkedIn account, since half of human resource professionals look up applicants' LinkedIn accounts. So, in this context, it is important for students to keep social media literacy. The study of Charlotte (2013) also broaches up the issue that businesses become more entrenched in the social media, so educators and students will need to keep up to date on the different platforms that people will use to publish, communicate and share content online now and in the future. It is important to note that the use of

technology should not be for technology's sake, but for bringing added value into the marketing curriculum and classroom (Chao, Parker, & Fontana, 2011, as cited in Charlotte, 2013). Thus, we can argue that, as students become more and more accustomed to the social and digital media in their personal lives, they will expect to have social media be a part of their academic and later professional lives. It is a good neo learning platforms for all in this globalized world.

Conclusion

The perception towards social media for learning achievement of students may be of both sides, positive and negative, but we must accept the reality that it is an integral part of students' life. It is a time to transform education and make learning fun and relevant to the real world in which we live. We live in the internet age and young people spend massive amounts of time on social media. The story of Ramesh Bista has inspired us to think about learning and communication use of social media in real practice. With four major themes, the study has found that social media is changing form of neo learning platform for students which has its own feature of learning pedagogy. The self-learning environment inside social media can create a significant impact upon those learners who cannot join formal education at school and colleges due to different reasons. The learners' friendly social media platform can be a good contributor in academic attainment for those who hate traditional chalk and talk method of education system. The group discussion and information sharing facilities are the beauty of social media which emphasize on student-centric learning environment where students can put their voice without hesitation. This may be fruitful to those students who are introverts and cannot share their feelings publicly in class. The swift communication and information sharing technology of social media is helpful for researchers who need multiple information within the span of certain time period. Social media is not only for information sharing and dissemination platform, rather it is practical platform for students to demonstrate their creative creation all over the world. The advertisement of creative works through social media is a strategy of marketing which automatically contributes to the development of professionalism inside students. It cannot be ignored that one of the prominent indicators of quality education is to make students more professional in their work. Hence, we have only options to internalize ourselves that social media can be a neo form of learning platform for the entire community of knowledge seeker.

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