



Educational Network Platforms in the Digital Era: An Analysis of Economic Efficiency and Political Inclusion

Dr. Manoj Kumar Sial¹, Manash Kumar Behera²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Bharti Vishwavidyalaya, Chhattisgarh, India

²Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Fakir Mohan University, Odisha, India

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Abstract: Over past few years, online social networking sites like Facebook, Orkut, Bebo and Twitter have grown in terms of popularity. While most people use these social networking tools to connect with friends, but by going through a close study one can easily observe that their utility extends much beyond the scope of knowing and connecting like-minded peoples. Such tool can also be used for learning and knowledge sharing purposes. Effective use of Social networking site becomes more valuable, when used for promoting Education. "Educational Networking" is an appropriate term, which uses social networking technologies for educational purposes. As the phrase "social networking" can sometime carries negative impact and specifying for educators, the phrase "educational networking" seems to be safer and more objectively towards discussing the pedagogical value. In this article, we have tried to provide a brief overview of how and why social network should be devoted to education starting from School level to Graduate and Post graduate level. Our works also include a bit of review of the concepts, definitions and categorizations available in Social Network literature. We have also argued on the central characteristic of Educational networking, which is a combination or personalization and socialization. This combination has a potential to facilitate the transparency between student communities. Such transparency gives students an insight into each other's work, leading to an increase in quality and benchmark of their own work.

1. Introduction

The set of relationships between individuals where each individual is a social entity is known as Social network. Social networks represent both, collection of ties between people and the strength of those ties. We may consider, even the relationship of a tiger and deer as food-chain relationship, as being social entity, it also constitutes a social network. Generally Social network is used as a measure of social "connectedness", within the social networks to observe and calculate about the quality and quantity of information flow within individuals as well as within groups. Hence, conclusions may have been drawn out of such model on relationship, correctness of information flow and even blockage of information at a certain node (or social entity). Building a model on the concept of social network can vary in size from relation between two individual to as big as interaction between two communities or even a relationship of countrymen belonging to different countries.



Social network sites are web-based services that allow individuals to do various jobs like constructing a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulating a list of users or groups with whom they share a connection, view and traverse the list of connections those made by others within that particular system (or site). The nature and nomenclature (i.e. relationship) of these connections varies for different sites. The word Social Network can be broken down into two words. Networking emphasizes the initiation of a relationship either between strangers or between persons known to each other up to certain degree. And since these sites are dealing with a relationship, we call them social sites. Together with the feature and technology of those activities through computer networks, such sites are recognizing as social network [11], [13].

When it comes to online social networking, websites and chatting utilities are commonly used over Internet and intranet. Social networking website functions like an online community of internet users. Depending on the website in question, many of these online community members share a common interest such as hobbies, religion, or politics or even regions. Once a user is allowed to access to a social networking website he/she starts to socialize. This socialization may include putting self-details as well as reading the profile pages of other members and possibly even contacting them [7], [16].

Social networking often involves grouping specific individuals or organizations together. Most of the social networking websites! Bells on one or other interests, but some sites have no affiliations towards any of the interest areas. Such websites without a main focus are known as 'traditional' social networking websites and they generally have open membership. This implies, one is allowed to be a member, no matter being difference in hobbies, beliefs, or views. But, once the particular member is inside this online community, he/she can begin to create his/her own network of friends and eliminate members that do not share common interests or goals [2], [14].

The friends or relations that a member makes are one of the benefits of online social networking. Another advantage includes diversity as the internet permits individuals, from around the globe to access these social networking sites. This leads to an interaction between person of different region, religion, community, culture status and language and give a wide scope to learn different issues as well as to gather wide range of diversified information.

Moreover, another benefit of Social Network Sites (SNSs) is that they allow individuals to meet strangers over network that makes a safe place to interact and increase the social radius. This leads to connection between individuals that would not otherwise happened. While SNSs have implemented a wide variety of technical features, their backbone consists of visible profiles that are displayable to every other person who are part of the sites [13]. However analysing these profiles, the question that comes to mind are:

1. What is the authenticity that the profiles consist of facts that are true, honest and acceptable?
2. What guarantee one can give that the information (some time personal) these profiles have will not be used for damaging or destruction or for wrong activities?

As per Boyd, Social network is differentiated by three features. The first one is Profiles: Which describes the background, interests and activities of a person or a group. The second one is the Relationship: It is used to connect people and can also help to determine who can see what part of person's profile and comments. And the third one is Comments: it may be notes, messages, asynchronous communication and video materials. I-le had also described the four types of Social network mediate, they are: (I) Persistent (Content can he saved for further reference), (ii) Searchable (Contents can be searched easily using techniques like fuzzy searching). (iii) Replicable (Contents can be copied easily) and (iv) Allow invisible Audience (It would be difficult to know, who might have seen the information) [3], [4], [5], [6].



2. Education network

Educational networking is a social networking site for students, teachers and it deals with thing related to study. One can set up a group for once class, college, school, learning group or university to make learning and teaching easier. Such education site helps the community to share the knowledge, helps is carrying out the research, assignments and homework [1].

In the paper we have argued about a central characteristic of Educational networking sites which is a combination of personalization and socialization. This combination has a potential to facilitate transparency between student communities. Transparency between students means that they have insight into each other's work, thoughts, and productions. Students might work at a distance and individually, and, thus, they are not necessarily aware of the activities of other students. In their individual work, however, students can write notes, search for literature, find relevant websites, write assignments, etc. This information and products would be relevant to other students and the entire community [18], [19].

Social networking sites do not necessarily involve communication, dialogue or collaboration. Instead, we have mainly focused on the characteristic of transparency. An interesting aspect of social interaction in social networking sites is that, the starting point for any communication is an individual or a person. In a social networking site according to the general trend and our observations, each individual has a personal page and profile, which he/she develops and modifies. Other people can view these pages and follow the activities of his/her ' friends `community' and a machine generated mappings on the people that they want to share with. In other words, actions within a social networking site are transparent which creates a kind of indirect or "passive" form of communication and sharing. It is not necessary to send messages or documents in order to communicate or share, instead, a user can update his/her profiles; add pictures, texts and comments to own page. This is the characteristic of personalization and socialization. The starting point for this kind of social interaction is students own work and their personal pages. The personal pages are then shared in a social network. We have tried discussing here about this approach and it may be utilized within university education by students sharing information and resources that are originally developed for themselves, but made available to others for instance bookmarks. references, links, animation, video dips and notes [9].

A special and dedicated Social network, which is used by the students and teachers communities for sharing academic resources, can be called as an educational network. Teachers and Instructors are the main source for transferring knowledge to the student community. The question that can be raised is how far the advancement of media and technology will able to penetrate into the classroom environment where these aids can replace the importance of the teachers. Concepts and knowledge may be made available round the clock with easy explanation, but a teacher is always required to explain such concepts and clear the doubts rose by students. So, instead of replacement, collaboration between technologies and teachers will lead to a stronger platform for teaching-learning process.

It was observed that, teaching with the modern technologies and methods including social network and education network sites has improved the teaching-learning and knowledge sharing process.

We have observed and mentioned about some practical issues that a teacher can take to prepare him / her for interacting with all students beyond the boundary of classroom.

- a) Creating a profile and uploading the materials on those social sites that are popular in the campus. Analysing about the features and style that make those sites to be popular among the student community. A teacher need to make his/her profile and represent the courses in such a way that it will not be necessity for him/her to conduct the classes for demonstrating on the location of the information. The teacher will only need to tell the class about the usage of the information. As student community is well versed with the representation of information, they will face no problems in accessing and browsing the required information and courses.



- b) Keeping the profile public makes it easier for the students as well as people from other academic community to interact together and give the needful inputs.
- c) Adding multimedia tutorials, graphs, case studies, papers and links to various online sources encourages the student communities to understand the course work in more versatile and deeper way. It also increases social networking bonds between the teacher and student outside the classroom environments and beyond the course hours.
- d) In one of the analysis, it was observed that if a teacher invite and peruse the student to join his/her community, student may join but they lack the interest, enthusiasm and the self-motivation to be a part of the teacher's community. Whereas, when students show self-interest to join their teacher's community then achievement and involvements among the students are more.

We found that a teacher must be open in accepting the request of each and every student but should not move from self-side to make the community larger. Slowly but surely a better social site with course and knowledge information will obviously attract the rest of the student

3. Sharing of information and interaction through education sites in campus

Schools and campus should encourage the student communities to interact among themselves. This will break the boundary of localization and geographical distance and student can keep themselves update with the research and academic activities, happening in the entire world. Social Educational sites facilities to teach students about the effective collaborators in that world, interaction with people around them, to be engaged, and inform them with the latest happenings in academic world. Such type, of networking can also be termed as Academic Environment [8],[15].

4. Social networks in the classroom

Social networks within a school play a high value. Today's children are sometime called as the Internet generation who are always found to be engaged with technology. During the literature review, a recent study found that 96% of students reported using social networks and 60% reported using them to talk about educational subjects. Half reported using social networks for school work. And yet 62% of schools in that survey prohibited blogging or online discussion boards at school. 52% prohibited any social networking sites at school. In that same study, 76% of parents felt that social networks could conceivably improve their children's reading and writing. This is an evidence of disconnection among the participants in education, teachers, students and parents. Embracing social networking technology and harnessing for use in the classroom is a paradigm shift that we felt is required. Placing it inside the school firewall would enhance its value dramatically while reducing school board concerns about the potential downside of these networks - cyber bullying, frivolous chat, use of explicit language, pictures or even inappropriate music. Going to a higher level i.e. the community of Graduate Students, they can also access Educational social network that enables researchers to bookmark their academic contributions and research related materials which includes publications, source code, presentations, tutorials, lecture notes, etc. Such network helps the graduate student in judging about the quantity and the quality of research without the going into vigorous search [10], [12].

When we focus on the groups, that will evolve out of such kind of education network, we feel that the relationship could be between 1) relations between students in a study group working on a joint assignment and 2) relations between individuals or study groups within the same course [12].

Thus, the relations do not exclude one another, but are supplementary in nature. Such relationships play a vital role in establishing Transparency [10], [11].



In this analysis, an example can be analysed as a particular case, where the situation is relevant within a university campus, in although which students are working on related projects or assignments, but are not collaborating. At universities it can be difficult for students to allow the work of other students; often, they are engaged in their own assignments. However, students can make use of each other's resources. (Often, students are unaware of what other students are doing, and they do not necessarily make use of each other, although their work is relevant to each other. The problem is only extended and an optimal solution can be achieved through online education, where students do not meet face-to-face but share their knowledge and academic thoughts [17], [20]

5. Conclusion

Social networking sites are not the new Learning Management Systems. However, the special kind of communication and interaction has a greater advantage, when implemented with a proper objective. In this paper, we have reviewed on various aspect of education network and its positive impacts on student from school, high school to graduate level. We have analysed about the on the benefits of academic community, when thoughts and knowledge is shared through networks. In one way, it does not hold any boundaries. During our discussion, we analysed several questions and situations that are evolving with the education network. Such network gives the socio-cultural approach, students' problem-oriented and self-governed activities and importance of learning through sharing of knowledge and ideas. The potential of educational networking lies within transparency and the ability to create awareness between students, grow their hunger to achieve a greater level in knowledge and in sharing thoughts. Lastly, discussing on its importance, we urge on motivating students and academic community including faculties to use share and to promote such platform for the growth of academic in every level from School to University campus and ultimately to global community.

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