



GRATIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG IRANIAN STUDENTS IN KARNATAKA STATE : AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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Preamble

In the new millennium social media have emerged as the most popular media of communication. There are several factors which have contributed to this rapid growth and development of social media. Prominent among them include technological factors (increased broadband availability, the improvement of software tools and the development of more powerful computers and mobile devices), social factors (rapid uptake of social media by younger age groups), economic factors (increasing affordability of computers and software and growing commercial interest in the social media sites) and political factors (increasing political mobilization and several political changes across the world). The world has witnessed a shift in the focus of Web applications towards social interaction, collaboration and networking. This development has also influenced education. Social media application has become a new way of life in the field of education. Scholars and technocrats had identified the ways and means for the inclusion of various social media applications in the learning process in higher education. The tools range from general-purpose tools for the generic community of interest to highly specialized tools for the support of learning in higher educational environment. The present investigation was carried out in Karnataka state to evaluate the gratifications of social media among Iranian students who are pursuing higher education.

Concept of Social Media

Scholars have examined the nature and diversity of social media platforms and offered various definitions. Drury (2008:07) defines social media as online resources that people use to share content: video, photos, images, text, ideas, insight, humor, opinion, gossip, news. The scholar has emphasized the social media behavior of people. Dykeman (2008:09) defined social media as the means for any person to: publish digital, creative content; provide and obtain real-time feedback via online discussions, commentary and evaluations; and incorporate changes or corrections to the original content. The scholar has highlighted the features of social media. Marchese (2007:26) distinguished social media from traditional media by stating that social media is not the media itself, but the system of discovery, distribution, consumption and conversation surrounding the media.

Safko and Brake (2009:35) considered social media as activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web-based applications that make possible for one to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios. In general, social media can be understood as online platforms for the interaction, collaboration, and creating/sharing of various types of digital contents Eisenberg (2008:10) opined that social media allow people to actively engage in a communication process not only as information receivers but also as message creators. The online applications are designed to facilitate information sharing, knowledge distribution, and opinion exchanges.

The social network sites are commonly defined as web based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system by Boyd and Ellison (2007:05).

Haythornthwaite (2005:13) writes: "What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between latent ties who share some offline connection. On many of the large SNSs, participants are not necessarily networking or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network. To emphasize this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, we label them social network sites". Basically, social media facilitate social interaction and participation in modern society.



Social Media in Education

The social media access has reduced the social exclusion of the students in modern times. They have also increased the self-efficacy of the learners. The authenticity and trust must be facilitated to enable confidence in personal security and the learning environment and social network (Liccardi et. al 2007:23). Students are spending much time on social media and are considered the largest category that uses such application (Griffith and Liyanage 2008:11).

The virtual world serves as a playing ground for developmental issues from the physical world use of technology which can influence educational performance of students positively or adversely. The students who used Internet based social media scored higher on reading skills test and had higher grades as well (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 2008:37). The lecturers may have to play a considerable technical support role in helping students who are new to such technologies (Lockyer and Patterson 2008:24).

The social media have facilitated much quicker and more convenient way to interact in educational and social settings (Neelamalar and Chitra 2009:28). Studies have reported that students learn in new ways using social media and that educators should embrace these new platforms.

The use of social networks as a tool supporting activities deemed important for the purpose of educational institutions, instructors, and students. The social media provide the users with a way of maintaining and strengthening social ties, which can be beneficial in both social and academic settings. The higher educational institutions have begun to incorporate a diverse array of digital technologies across their teaching, research and public relations activities. This incorporation of digital technologies has begun to attract discussion in a range of forums. More specifically, calls for academics to use social media tools and platforms have emerged in the past few years. The higher educational institutions are challenged to provide modern systems and methods for supporting studying in social levels if multilevel interaction with students (Al-Rahmi and Othman 2009:04). University administrators may consider using Facebook as a learning tool to enhance academic performance, or find ways to deter recreational Facebook use and promote better time-management skills (Karpinski 2009:19).

The students are also in a better position to publish and present their work to a wide audience through blogs, wikis, or podcasts. The learners benefit from the opportunity to appropriate new ideas, and transform their own understanding through reflection (Dale and Pymm 2009:06). The students are able to publish their work and ideas in a public space for others to view and download. The multimedia files can be shared on file sharing websites such as Flickr, YouTube or Slideshare and social bookmarking sites which allow users to bookmark certain websites or tag keywords for users with similar interests to peruse (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:18).

The use of Twitter as enhanced academic engagement of the students and improved their grade point. Twitter can be used as an educational tool to help engage students and to mobilize faculty into a more active and participatory role Junco and Loken (2010:15). Students are managing their time efficiently and hence, use of SNSs does not harm their academic performance (Ahmed and Qazi 2011:02).

The use of supporting technologies in addition to the primary tools provides evidence of how social technologies have become arguably prevalent in today's classrooms. The social technologies are used to complement the traditional face-to-face teaching delivery. This also indicates that conventional teaching and learning is still relevant but made more relevant by introducing newer technologies to provide an enriched learning experience for students (Hamid et. al 2011:12).

The study of social networks within a learning domain encompasses the processes of social learning that occurs when a self-selecting group of people who have a common interest in a subject collaborate to share ideas or find solutions (Khan 2012:20). It is imperative to recommend and sensitize Nigerian youths to the benefits of using Facebook to access, gather and distribute academic articles, summaries, texts, journals, research findings, etc., that can augment their knowledge level as well as currency in terms of new developments in the different discipline (Adaja and Ayodele 2013:01). The students have improved their grades after using Facebook as a social media. The improvements and value of social network sites was not related to the academic performance but also to the adaptation to the social environment of school (Tuan and Tu 2013:39).

Younger students tended to use Facebook more frequently than older students to keep in touch with friends from high school or from their hometown. Social media fulfills different communication needs for different users (Megan and Priscilla 2013:27). The social media should be expanded and new pages should be created to enhance academic activities to avoid setbacks in the students' academic performance. The environment including parents, teachers and friends should be a good example in order to improve their academic achievement (Kamuh 2014:17). The social media connections also provide



academic and emotional support to the students (Lupton 2014:25). There is increasing use of social media by the members of the academic community.

The social networking services can facilitate learning and skill development outside formal learning environments by supporting peer-to-peer learning of knowledge and skills, collaboration, diverse cultural expression; the development of skills valued in the modern workplace and a more empowered conception of citizenship (Omekwu et. al 2014:29). It is imperative to concentrate on how to stop and avoid smartly the misuse of SNT rather trying to stop or avoid use technologies (Kabbur and Savitri 2015:16).

In Face Book, most of the permissions set as default enable friends of a user to view everything in a person's profile (Griffith and Liyanage 2008:11). The Facebook has become the most preferred and accessible social network to the young generation of users including the students. The use of Facebook by the academic community has been examined by the scholars. The Facebook has no impact on the grades of the students (Pasek and Hargittai 2009:31). The social media have the capacity to facilitate collaborative learning in modern times. The misuse or overuse of social media by the students has negative impact (Sponcil and Gitimu 2012:36). The social networks have also affected the academic performance of the students since their attention; time and energy are diverted to other activities. The virtual life of student destructs the concentration of students from education towards other non-academic activities. The government and international cyber jurisdiction should take part and ban these types of websites (Tariq et. al 2012:38).

Review of Literature

Prominent studies concerning the present topic of investigation include – Dwyer et al. (2007:08), Griffith and Liyanage (2008:11), Karpinski (2009:19), Krischner and Karpinski (2010:21), Junco et al. (2010:15), Ahmed and Qazi (2011:02), Ahn (2011:03), Khan (2012:20), Tariq et al. (2012:38), Rey (2013:33), Rithika and Selvaraj (2013:34), Omekwu et.al (2014:29), Kuppuswamy and Narayan (2014:22), Hutton and Henderson (2015:14), Paladin et al. (2015:30), Kabbur and Savitri (2015:16) and Rashid (2015:32). The review of literature clearly indicates that social media access, social media use patterns, uses of social media, gratifications of social media and effects of social media with reference to students are examined to certain extent by the past researchers. The synthesis of the available literature confirms that the impact of social media on Iranian students was not subjected to any scientific research either in India or Iran.

Significance of the Study

There is an emerging literature of small-scale, 'empirical' studies that confidently reports all manner of specific learning gains and benefits from social media. The scholars have noted the positive and negative implications of social media on the students from primary to university levels in India and abroad. The impact of social media on students is not best understood in a developing country like India. Adequate scientific investigations are required to contribute new knowledge about the uses and gratifications of social media with special reference to foreign students who are pursuing higher education in India. The review of literature clearly indicates that adequate scientific investigations are not carried out on the gratifications of social media among the Iranian students in Karnataka state universities. Hence, the study assumes profound academic and social significance.

Research Methodology

The present study approached the problem through a systematic survey method which fits into the context of the present investigation. Before administering the interview schedule to the final respondents of the study, a pre-test was conducted in Mangalore, a non-sample area.

Table: Field of Study and Sample

Sl. No	Organizations	Humanities Faculty	Science Faculty	Management Faculty	Medical/Engineering Faculty	Total
1.	Bengaluru Division	60	60	60	60	240
2.	Mysuru Division	20	20	20	20	80
3.	Belgaum Division	20	20	20	20	80
4.	Gulbarga Division	20	20	20	20	80
	Total	120	120	120	120	480

Primary data were collected through structured, organized and standardized interview schedules which were administered to the Iranian students in Karnataka state. About 480 respondents were approached for the purpose of primary data collection.



Besides survey method, non-participant observation, informal discussions and secondary data analysis were also followed by the researcher. The entire study was exploratory in nature.

The study being descriptive in nature, no parametric statistical tests were involved to draw inferences based on the sample results. The interpretation of the chi-square and contingency table analysis justify the assumption of independence which was primarily carried out at the 0.05% level of significance.

Major Findings of the Study

Demographic Features of the Respondents

A majority of the study sample represent the male category (56.67%), below 25 years age group (54.17%), graduate's category (54.58%), professional course category (55.83%) and middle income group (56.67%) respectively.

Gratifications of Social Media

- The creation of learning platform by the social media is satisfactory (76.67%).
- The aggregation of resources and information by the social media is satisfactory (71.67%).
- The inter-cultural and cross-cultural dialogue facilitated by the social media is satisfactory (85.83%).
- The opportunities for socialization and networking online are satisfactory (78.33%).
- The social media oriented academic networking is satisfactory (76.67%).
- The social media oriented online tutorial classes are satisfactory (83.33%).
- The social media support for research endeavors is satisfactory (59.17%).
- The social media oriented new learning ways and practices are satisfactory (54.17%).
- The social media oriented new learning environment for students is satisfactory (80.42%).
- The integration of the curriculum and mainstream of academic life by the social media is satisfactory (63.75%).
- The creation of productive learning experience by the social media is satisfactory (52.92%).
- The establishment of networks for promotion of openness and sharing of information by social media are satisfactory (63.33%).
- The social media oriented exchange of information, ideas and best practices is not satisfactory (70.83%).
- The tracking of all the intellectual resources by the social media are not satisfactory (55.0%).
- The self-directed learning for the young generation facilitated by social media is not satisfactory (55.83%).

Testing of Hypothesis

H1. The social media association of Iranian students in Karnataka state is uniform.

The data which are presented in the thesis clearly reveal that the social media association of Iranian students studying in Karnataka state is not common. Hence, the above hypothesis stands disproved according to the data analysis.

H2. The social media services are satisfactory to the Iranian students in Karnataka state.

The data which are presented in the thesis clearly reveal that the social media services were satisfactory to the Iranian students studying in Karnataka state. Hence, the above hypothesis stands proved according to the data analysis.

Limitations of the Study

It was not practically possible for the researcher to enjoy the benefit of accessibility of data to all the Iranian students who are pursuing higher education in Karnataka state due to certain constraints. It was not practically possible to contact all the stakeholders of higher education on the uses and gratifications of social media from education, research, publication and development points of view. The usual limitations of the survey method such as time, human inadequacies, resource constraints, recollection and communication were experienced by the researcher. Incidental, purposive and stratified sampling methods were followed in selecting the respondents. Though much care has been taken to collect the primary data, the memory bias on the part of the respondents cannot be completely ruled out.

Implications of the Study

The Internet is fully integrated into all elements of business and society. Internet has become an informal university all over the world. The social media have gained immense power and popularity because of their ability for better mobilization of people in all walks of life. There needs to be a strategic reason and plan in place to use social media. Social media offers plenty of opportunities to the stakeholders of higher education as crucial tools for their communication and marketing strategies. Naturally, social media offers the means to stay ahead with the digital strategy and target audiences of centers of higher education. *Social media offers advancement professionals a great opportunity for keeping in touch with alumni after*



they graduate. Social media gives plenty of opportunities to humanize stories of students and alumni of various educational institutions in order to create loyalty and earn future business (students), and ultimately their respect. For the past few years, many higher education institutions have used social media channels to connect with prospective and current students, and their efforts are paying off. Social media can support student engagement, collaboration and self-managed learning by creating a platform for meaningful natural discussion. The implications of the study in general terms are presented as follows.

- The higher educational institutions should achieve the goal of digital literacy in order to ensure optimum use of social media for higher educational management.
- Higher education needs to have a role in both enabling learners to manage the abundance of resources and relationships that are accessible via the Internet.
- The higher educational authorities should explore new avenues and opportunities for judicious and creative use of digital tools for knowledge management.
- The use of social media tools for teaching and learning is not systematically supported in most higher education institutions.
- It is necessary to switch from the traditional lecture and questions/answers approach to better use the various social media tools to meet students' needs and expectations in higher educational institutions.
- The social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat and so on should be systematically utilized for the purpose of harnessing the potentials of social media for educational progress.
- The educational institutions should build the digital communities through groups in order to promote various events, showcase campus culture, post timely and relevant information, cultivate human relations, build connections with alumni and current students and share time-specific announcements.
- The social media should be expanded and new pages should be created to enhance academic activities and avoid setbacks to the academic performance of the students.
- The environment including parents, teachers and friends should be a good example in order to improve their academic achievement.
- The students should create a balance between using the social media and academic activities. There should be a decrease in the duration of time spent by students on social media habits in order to enhance the impact of social media on the academic performance of students.
- The impact of social media on the academic performance of students should focus more on the positive side than on the negative side to achieve balance.
- There is an imminent need for the inclusion of the professionals as blogs and wikis members in order to add real-world knowledge to their learning and the course in general.
- The students should be enabled to gain absolute mastery over using a variety of social media approaches for academic endeavors.
- There is also an urgent need for the inclusion of social media in the course and application of social media in all higher-level academic courses.
- The teachers must be given adequate freedom to design time and opportunities for the use of social media activities into their course syllabi.
- The teachers should be enabled to allocate more time to supporting courses with social media components.
- The teachers and students must be open to learning and using new social media class room approaches that extend and enhance teacher-student interactions.
- The visiting faculties and other resource person should be enabled to participate in the sharing of knowledge by using social media.
- The authorities should facilitate incorporation of social media approaches in the course in order to enhance student learning outside the classroom.

Conclusion

The stakeholders of higher education should understand that students want to incorporate more appropriate use of social media in the process of learning. *The higher educational institutions should make necessary arrangements for the incorporation of social media approaches since they are better alternative ways to cover topics and even as a means for introducing additional topics.* The social media has the potential to engage students with their teachers and to in turn for teachers to reach out to them and appear more approachable. The harmful effects of social media on the students need to be examined in order to ensure meaningful checks and balances for efficient use of social media for achieving the goal of academic excellence in higher educational institutions across the globe.



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